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751-1000
쿠유 장편소설 ❖ 터닝 ❖
Turning

Turning ( ) by Kuyu ( ). Volume 4 (Chapters 751-1000)

Yuder was a commoner Omega who rose to the top with his ability.

When he woke up again after being falsely accused and executed, he was back 11 years ago before everything began.

A chance to get back…

He must not repeat the same mistake he did before.

To survive, and to save the world, now he had to save the man he had killed!

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Chapter 751

“If I’m to speak frankly… of course, I don’t want to stop. But if we do it here, we’ll get cold.”

After these words, Kishiar tenderly bit and sucked on Yuder’s lower lip, then let it go. It was a clever touch, gentle enough not to hurt but still unmistakably stimulating.

In Kishiar’s gaze, fixed upon Yuder’s now swollen lips, the unquenched fervor was evident.

It was enough to assure Yuder that Kishiar had no intention of stopping this act just yet.

“Understood. Let’s go.”

Hearing Yuder’s response, Kishiar smiled slyly and raised his hand. The large, soft white cloths, neatly piled near the door, flew elegantly through the air, landing gracefully in his palm. These cloths, large enough to envelop even a tall adult male, were towels used by nobles to dry or wrap their bodies after a bath.

“Now, let’s get up,” Kishiar said, expertly grabbing one end of a towel and spreading it. He spun it around, suddenly enveloping both himself and Yuder in its folds.

“Wait a moment…”

Before Yuder could protest about sharing a single towel, Kishiar led him to the bedroom with fluid, natural movements.

Exiting the bathroom and closing the door behind them, Kishiar appeared no different than usual. But the moment they entered the dimly lit bedroom, the atmosphere shifted dramatically.

“Yuder.”

As Yuder turned at the sound of his name, Kishiar’s lips met his, overlapping with his own.

“Hmm…”

Yuder nearly stumbled backward, but Kishiar’s quick reflexes, pulling up the towel, supported his head. The kiss, deeper and more secretive than in the bathroom, enveloped them under the towel’s small shade. Yuder, feeling unsteady, wrapped his arms around Kishiar’s neck.

The act, hidden in the darkness of a single cloth, felt secretly and sinfully forbidden.

After a while, when Kishiar lifted his head and dropped the towel, Yuder’s resolve had returned, as if nothing had happened.

“Commander,” Yuder murmured.

Kishiar responded with a bright, silent laugh. At the same time, a surge of blind emotions, screaming to be embraced, flowed into Yuder’s heart.

In the presence of that blinding light, everything else faded and disappeared.

“Ah…”

As Yuder gasped, Kishiar pressed his lips to his, embracing his waist. Yuder willingly accepted everything, embracing Kishiar in return.

They entangled urgently, turning this way and that, exploring each other’s bodies. They did not feel the unnecessary nature of their actions, lost in each other’s presence.

Yuder regained his surroundings only after stumbling against a nightstand, spilling onto the bed with Kishiar.

“Hmm…”

The sensation of sinking into the bed was dizzyingly thrilling. Before the bed's rocking subsided, Yuder eagerly wrapped his legs around Kishiar, already entangled between them. Where they were or how they were positioned no longer mattered.

"Hurry, quickly."

In the searing heat of liberation, all that was desired was to be even more free with the being before them.

Amidst the familiar scent and presence, confidence in this fact was affirmed with a slight shiver, as fingers as desirous as Yuder's finally grasped and lifted the back of the knees.

Yuder inhaled sharply in anticipation of what was to come, but for some reason, Kishiar did not move immediately from that position. His forehead was sweaty and his body hot, clearly not far from climax, yet he suddenly became lost in thought. It was an incomprehensible action.

"Commander…?"

At Yuder's call, Kishiar finally lifted his head.

"No, it's nothing."

A soft reply came back.

Yuder wanted to ask more, but the thoughts vanished temporarily due to the fingers that slipped inside.

"Ah, uh…"

A tight sensation was felt, but it wasn't painful. Even though it had been a while since their bodies had overlapped after the heat period, the experience of being fully opened once didn't just disappear.

Yuder was certain that the tightness would soon fade. And as expected, not long after the fingers moved, a moist sound began to emanate from below.

It meant the body of an omega Awakener was changing, desiring its counterpart.

‘Until just before that heat period, my body didn’t get wet this quickly…’

Certainly, something had changed since then. Yuder speculated that the change started the moment he compromised with his instincts.

It was the first time he hadn’t felt repulsed by his instincts as an Awakener with a second gender.

That’s why things that would have seemed needless and nauseating before now didn’t feel bad. There was no embarrassment or shame.

Even if he didn’t overlap bodies with Kishiar, his feelings towards him wouldn’t change, and it wouldn’t hinder living. But he didn’t want to give up what could only be obtained and felt when their naked bodies touched. To Yuder now, all these were equally important.

Inside Yuder, the fingers that were moving had increased in number. Due to their size, which couldn’t be dismissed as just fingers, the inside kept pleading for relief from the tightness, which was soon solved as more moisture seeped out.

But even with enough fingers to widen, Kishiar for some reason did not stop moving.

“Ah, uh, ah!”

Yuder tightened around the unusually aggressive fingers inside him and threw his head back. The movement, penetrating and withdrawing between the sensitive membranes, resonated in his abdomen as if it was an actual insertion, with each squelching sound, transparent mucus flowed between the bones, and his vision flashed.

As he bit his lip and twisted his waist, Kishiar kissed him as if to soothe. Yet the sound of friction below did not change. Yuder swallowed his breath and was about to say something to Kishiar, but his head was thrown back

with a sudden surge of pleasure. Instinctively clutching the front, his waist involuntarily shook, and a climax surged from the tingling inside his lower abdomen.

“Ah…!”

As Yuder released his second climax, hot fluid splashed between his stomach and thighs. Yuder realized that it was Kishiar’s ejaculate, suddenly released, and his eyes widened.

Unbeknownst to him, Kishiar had penetrated him with his fingers while simultaneously holding himself.

It was clear, even without asking, that he had deliberately ejaculated without insertion. Yuder was so bewildered that he couldn’t think of anything.

“…Commander. What exactly…?”

“Hm? It doesn’t always have to be inserted for it to be an act.”

Kishiar responded with a face tinged with the languor of the aftermath.

“Isn’t a flavor a bit different from the usual also pleasant? I found it quite delightful.”

Indeed, it wasn’t as if there had never been times before when they had physically entangled without going all the way. If one were to question whether it was enjoyable or not, the answer would certainly be that it was. However, today was somehow different from those times.

Yuder thought that Kishiar had seemed intent on going all the way until partway through. The sudden change in decision must surely have had a reason.

‘I felt something was off since the moment I lifted my knees. But why?’

Yuder raised his hand to stop Kishiar, who seemed about to tend to something between his legs. A doubtful gaze swept over Kishiar and then

moved towards his own legs.

“Yuder.”

“Wait. Do not touch.”

Without hesitation, Yuder peered between his own legs, prompting Kishiar to extend a hand as if to stop him, only to halt abruptly, blocked by refusal. His eyebrows softened as he wore a subtle expression.

“…”

Seeing that expression, Yuder was certain that something had been discovered near his leg, prompting a change of heart. Yuder lightly used his power to inspect the inside of his knee. The moment he caught a small mirror carried by the wind, Kishiar finally spoke.

“There’s a wound there.”

‘A wound?’

“It’s not a major mark. So small that I didn’t notice it even when bathing. Just a few tiny bruises remained, like dots on the inner thigh.”

According to Kishiar, these were minute bruises, barely visible to the naked eye, lingering on the inner side of the thigh. It seemed the injury sustained today wasn’t limited to his wrist.

‘When did I get it? Fighting monsters, or when I clashed with those Southern merchants?’

He recalled a time when he had rolled on the ground while confronting Aton. Losing all his candies and enduring a fair bit of trouble because of that creature, it wouldn’t have been strange if such injuries had remained unnoticed.

‘But it doesn’t hurt, and the wound is so small it can barely be seen.’

“Did you really stop because of that?”

“Yes, because of that.”

“It doesn’t hurt at all, really, because of that…”

“A wound whose cause even you can’t remember might turn into something far more dangerous, don’t you know?”

The possibility was slim, but it was there.

With just a few words, the man silenced Yuder for a moment, then broke the silence with a sigh and a smile.

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Chapter 752

With just a few words, the man silenced Yuder for a moment, then broke the silence with a sigh and a smile.

“I didn’t expect to be so startled, it’s my fault for noticing too late and not behaving properly.”

“It’s not about blaming you, Commander. I just…”

Kishiar appeared to have settled everything immediately after the incident, looking refreshed. However, sensing the emotions transmitted, Yuder inferred that Kishiar still harbored a similar fervor. It’s just that after seeing the wound on the leg, he was quickly moving past it.

This would lead to Kishiar’s intended outcome, and having cooled off, he would be able to sleep comfortably. Logically, that was the right decision.

But logic doesn’t always point to the right answer.

Yuder struggled to define the whirlwind of emotions and thoughts within him but decided he didn’t want to back down.

The man, already adept at suppressing even his basic sexual desires through strength, had likely led himself to climax just now not only to avoid awkwardness but also because he had promised not to extinguish that heat in Yuder’s presence.

His calm and characteristic consideration weighed heavily on Yuder’s heart.

Today felt like the day Kishiar had been completely liberated for the first time.

Just the fact that Yuder had recognized this made him happy, smiling at the one who had laughed joyfully. He didn’t want to be the reason for Kishiar to fold his wings he had finally spread, regardless of any injuries or

situations Yuder might face. He wanted to prove that he could continue to move forward with Kishiar, no matter what.

So, for tonight at least, he wished for Kishiar to spread his wings fully.

Even if it was greedy, still.

Because he had seen that face, smiling awkwardly yet brightly with joy.

‘Yes.’

That was what Yuder wanted to convey to Kishiar, the essence of the freedom he longed to share with him.

“…”

As Yuder struggled to organize his thoughts, a hand intervened, preventing him from habitually biting his lip. Their eyes met, connecting their gazes.

Without a word, Kishiar seemed to wear an expression as if he had already heard all the words Yuder wanted to say.

Silence flowed, and finally, Kishiar furrowed his brows, letting out a somewhat painful smile.

“So, this is what it means to understand each other’s feelings. Everything I tried to hide and sort out has been conveyed to you, and in turn, I can’t ignore the passionate and straight desire you hold.”

“…”

As the thumb that had been pressing and rubbing under Yuder’s lips delved slightly inwards, Yuder hesitated for a moment before wrapping it with his tongue. The skin began to moisten silently with saliva, but Kishiar did not withdraw his finger. After confirming this, Yuder moved further, biting down on the finger that had entered his mouth and then letting go. The force was enough to leave a faint mark but not to cause pain.

Looking down at the finger with the mark, Kishiar exhaled deeply.

“As the old saying goes, the most frightening persuasion is not one that strikes the mind but the heart.”

Indeed, there was no fault in that saying.

As the whisper tickled his ear and the finger slipped from his lips, Kishiar leaned down once more, deeply embracing Yuder’s lips.

After a deep kiss that left Yuder’s head spinning, the man finally raised his head. A faint smile, as if he was lost in the resurgent, unexpected heat within his reddened eyes, faintly lingered.

Though unsure of the details, Yuder instinctively realized that he had partially unfolded Kishiar’s long-suppressed desires. His heart, initially bewildered, swelled with relief and joy.

“…Commander.”

“Just once more, but not here.”

His fingers lightly gripped Yuder’s hips before releasing them. Yuder, slightly dissatisfied, retorted.

“Why not?”

“I have eyes, I know full well that my size isn’t something to enjoy carelessly without thinking of the aftermath. I don’t want to overexert someone who has much to do tomorrow. That would be nothing short of criminal.”

It was a stark admission, yet it rang true.

“But…”

“But just because we don’t use that doesn’t mean we can’t be satisfied.”

Before Yuder could say it was okay, Kishiar spoke softly yet firmly, interrupting him. Simultaneously, his fingers moved slightly above the hip, pressing into the flesh of the thigh.

That alone stirred a sensitive sensation inside Yuder’s untouched skin, causing his body to instinctively shudder. Seeing this, Kishiar’s red eyes twinkled with a knowing smile.

“I might have been clumsy just now, leaving you wanting, but it won’t be the same this time. I’ll prove there’s a way to please us both without using that.”

His hand, holding the thigh, slid upwards. Yuder felt the need to speak out about one particular limitation.

“Lying face down won’t work.”

“I know. You dislike not being able to see faces. I remember that much, so don’t worry.”

As his hand continued its ascent, leaving a trail of tingling sensation on the skin, it finally stopped at the ankle. The man, holding Yuder’s ankles crossed, smiled sweetly, then suddenly lifted them onto his shoulder. Yuder was forced into a position where his thighs were tightly pressed together.

Unable to guess his intentions, Yuder blinked in observation. Soon, the scented oil from the bathhouse drenched the space between Kishiar’s hand and Yuder’s leg. The warm, slippery liquid, heated by the bathhouse’s warmth, was strongly infused with Kishiar’s intense scent, enveloping Yuder.

“…”

“I’ll penetrate like this. Tense the insides of your legs… and focus on me.”

Though Yuder didn’t grasp the meaning with his mind, his body reflexively tensed in response to the heated voice.

Kishiar, gripping the ankle on his shoulder, pushed his lower body forward as if to penetrate. Yuder felt the hot presence sliding between his legs, instinctively tensing deep inside. However, Kishiar’s member didn’t enter a

hole but slid over it, forcefully wedging between the tightly closed thighs, drenched in scented oil.

The sensation of the oiled flesh sliding against another’s skin was startlingly unfamiliar. A gap forcibly opened between the tightly closed thighs, above the perineum. The hot tip of Kishiar’s manhood slid up, piercingly pressing against Yuder’s own sac and shaft. In that moment, Yuder involuntarily gasped in surprise.

“Ah!”

It was merely a frictional stroke between their groins, yet Yuder felt a dizzying surge of pleasure in an instant.

In the moment the enormity entered, the sensation of being opened was distinctly different from what could be felt in the belly. Yet, there was undeniably a similar pressure. Yuder, startled by this experience he had never encountered in his previous life, gasped for breath as Kishiar watched his reaction intently, a smile gracing his lips.

“…Didn’t I say it would be good for both of us?”

That was all that could be said. Yuder, feeling the rapid thrusting movements of the hips, tilted back his head.

The insertion, inevitably necessitating caution, was similar yet entirely different in every aspect. The body was roughly shaken due to the much faster slipping and thrusting movements, and an unfamiliar heat emanated from the skin heated by friction.

“Ah, ah… Ah… Ah!”

But what was clear was that this unfamiliar act was indeed pleasurable, just as Kishiar had said.

The relentless and unyielding tip of the phallus pierced and pushed up the perineum, causing shivers and involuntary twisting of the hips every time it brushed against bone and hole. The sensation of it sliding under his own

organ, piercing through the thighs, was so stimulating that Yuder could hardly adapt to it.

Yuder, uttering moans as they came, grasped Kishiar’s arms. The man, not losing his grip on Yuder’s ankles crossed over his shoulders, firmly held them and pressed his lips there.

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Chapter 753

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The pronounced shinbone, the calves slightly mottled with traces of abrasions, and the lean top of the foot-Kishiar’s lips glided over them continuously. Each time he lifted his waist, Yuder involuntarily flinched, feeling the heat of those lips even on his twitching toes.

“Just there, ah…!”

Just as Yuder was about to protest that it was dirty, the man, firmly gripping the ankle, drew the curled toes into his mouth with a red-lipped suction, drowning out Yuder’s voice. Despite the more intense sensations arising from their clashing lower abdomens, Yuder couldn’t tear his eyes away from the sight.

The tongue, capable of seducing anyone, now humbly worshipped Yuder’s feet. The eyes that frankly revealed his pleasure mirrored every reaction of Yuder’s wide-open eyes and body.

Yuder and Kishiar had intertwined many times, and during the previous heat period, Yuder had completely submitted to the man’s lips. However, this indulgence felt new. Previously, there had been a purpose, a soothing intent, but now it was purely for the sake of the act itself.

Kishiar, like a beast satiating its hunger, began to move his hips more quickly and resiliently than ever. Their bodies churned together, stirring the sheets like frothing waves.

The repeatedly rubbed inner thighs burned hot. Despite the slippery oil, some areas stung sharply. However, this mild itching and irritation strangely intensified the pleasure.

Doubting his own affinity for pain, Yuder swallowed his moans. Kishiar's movements, sometimes pressing up beneath Yuder's genitals and reaching near the navel, stirred an erratic array of sensitive sensations.

As these sensations accumulated, Yuder, already having climaxed several times and finding his insides growing hot again, tried to resist instinctively but in vain. Kishiar's timing was impeccable, thrusting hard at the perineum.

"…!"

The tingling sensation that started deep within surged upward, turning the numbness in his testicles into a wave of pleasure that didn't culminate in release but took a different direction.

The sensations, spreading deeper than before, quivered like a dam about to burst.

At the moment when his instinct sensed an imminent explosion, Kishiar bit down hard on the tendon above Yuder's heel. Yuder gasped and arched his back.

Pleasure burst inside him like a breached dam, sending shivers cascading wildly. With eyes wide and mouth agape, Yuder experienced a depth of pleasure more intense than ever, despite the minimal release.

Simultaneously, Kishiar, on his second climax, released so much that it drenched past Yuder's thighs, soaking the closed groin and buttocks area.

For a moment, Yuder lay still, feeling the sensations that had swept through his body, breathing heavily. Indeed, Kishiar had not lied. It was an incredible experience, one that was hard to believe could be achieved without physical insertion.

Kishiar finally lowered Yuder's ankles, which he had stacked upon each other. As Kishiar's grip released, Yuder's thighs fell apart weakly, revealing his disheveled lower abdomen. The area, soaked and smeared with scented

oil and semen, looked indecently raw, still marked by the redness caused by friction.

Yuder, seemingly indifferent to this, didn't pay any mind, but Kishiar's gaze lingered there for a long while.

"…Why do you look so intently?" Yuder asked.

"I was just reminiscing if I had ever seen anything as beautiful as this in my life," Kishiar replied thoughtfully.

Yuder frowned slightly, silently bringing his legs together. Kishiar chuckled softly and reached for a long cloth entangled at the head of the bed, gently wiping Yuder's damp skin.

"Did it hurt?" Kishiar inquired gently.

"Where do you mean?" Yuder asked.

"There, from before."

Kishiar's finger hovered teasingly close to the inside of Yuder's thigh. Yuder glanced down indifferently, then shook his head.

"No… Not at all."

If anything, Yuder wondered if he had actually enjoyed the sensation of being rubbed.

"That's good to hear."

Having cleaned Yuder's skin, Kishiar lightly kissed his forehead once more. Though the gesture was similar to before, his demeanor seemed more relaxed, more content. Yuder, having achieved what he desired, felt a deep satisfaction blossoming from within.

With their purpose fulfilled, the vivid connection of emotions they had shared seemed to quiet down, closing off as before. They lay comfortably together, their limbs entwined, feeling each other's heartbeats.

In Kishiar’s embrace, none of the thoughts that had previously troubled Yuder’s mind could intrude. Surprisingly, everything felt calm, clean, and peaceful.

Peace. Despite the irony of the word in their current context, it was undeniably fitting.

As Yuder slowly savored this unfamiliar sensation, a low voice suddenly broke the silence.

“I had something I wanted to ask earlier, but can I ask it now? It can wait if you’re sleepy,” the voice said gently.

Yuder opened his eyes reflexively, shaking his head as he met the speaker’s gaze.

“No, I haven’t fallen asleep yet. Please, go ahead.”

What could he possibly ask? Yuder pondered, but then a question he hadn’t anticipated at all was posed.

“I was curious why, after dealing with the Southern merchants, Nathan returned seemingly unscathed, but you came back exhausted and disheveled. I heard from Nathan that you used an enormous amount of power unexpectedly while dealing with them?”

Yuder felt as if he had been caught off guard, momentarily speechless.

“It seems that might be the cause of your condition, but I never heard anything related to that in the reports. Was there a reason you needed to use such strong power then?”

The moment Yuder recalled Aton’s face, the brief peace he had felt was momentarily disturbed.

Given that the man had always been overly sensitive even to minor injuries Yuder sustained, it was natural for him to harbor questions, especially since Nathan Zuckerman, who had been with Yuder on the mission, returned

much later yet unharmed. It seemed that Kishiar had been too preoccupied with other matters to address his concerns about this particular issue.

However, he couldn't very well admit that his mind had been completely thrown off because all the candy Kishiar gave him had shattered, could he? It just didn't seem appropriate.

"That was… I thought it wasn't worth reporting, so I didn't mention it."

"But?"

The man gently caught the tail end of my words and questioned back.

No matter how Yuder looked at it, Kishiar's face didn't seem like it would let Yuder go until he heard a convincing truth.

'…If Kishiar really wants to find out, he could easily learn it by questioning Aton, who's been captured, instead of me. Yet he asked me first, probably wanting to hear my side of the story.'

It was something that couldn't be completely kept secret anyway. Recalling it was unpleasant, but Yuder decided he had to confess at least a part of it.

"…Sir Zuckerman is right. There was a bit of an incident when dealing with Aton, the leader of the Southern merchants. I exerted quite a bit of strength. Had I known that something was happening here too, I would have restrained myself. I only regret that now."

"What happened?"

Kishiar, like a ghost, deftly avoided all the unnecessary parts of Yuder's words and pierced straight to the heart of the matter.

"…Do you really need to hear it? It's nothing of importance for the Commander to worry about."

"If it involves you, it can't be unimportant. It must have been a significant matter for my usually calm and far-sighted assistant to use his strength so recklessly. It doesn't make sense for me not to know about it."

He had expected him to react roughly like this. Yet, knowing it didn't make it any easier to stop such words.

Sigh. A sigh naturally escaped his lips.

'Can't be helped.'

"…They broke."

"Hm?"

"The things you gave me in the carriage, they shattered while I was fighting that man. That's why it happened."

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Chapter 754

“The things you gave me in the carriage, they shattered while I was fighting that man. That’s why it happened.”

Despite his effort to speak calmly, Yuder couldn’t hide the hot anger and a hint of frustration in his voice. He felt slightly ashamed that Kishiar had caught him being so bothered by such a trivial matter.

Had it been anything else that broke, Yuder wouldn’t have cared. If it were a different part of his clothing torn to shreds, or even if he sustained worse injuries, it wouldn’t have mattered.

But no matter how much he thought ‘what if,’ what’s done cannot be undone. It was the candy that broke, and Yuder was angry, consumed by the thought that he must inflict as much damage on the enemy as he felt in his anger.

In hindsight, it was quite foolish.

“…”

Kishiar, aware of this, remained silent for a long time after hearing Yuder’s confession. Yuder thought he would have reacted the same way, even if he were the Cavalry Commander.

To think he used more than half of his strength during the mission just because he was angry over something so insignificant. His excuse that he was confident enough to handle whatever happened next, using only the remaining strength, lost its ground after the series of events in the southern branch.

One should always remain calm and take full responsibility for any unplanned actions, including controlling all the variables. Yet, he failed to do so himself. What would he have done if someone else had done such a thing during his time as Commander Yudrain?

‘Certainly, I would have forcefully corrected that person until they came to their senses.’

Yes, that would have been the right approach.

But the infuriating part was that even knowing this, he still felt a surge of emotion betraying reason when he thought of that time…

Struggling to gather his thoughts, Yuder spoke, “I was swept away by a moment’s emotion, knowing that I should not be off guard. I will make sure that the same thing does not happen next time.”

Finally, Kishiar spoke with a long sigh, “This is maddening.”

His murmuring was not far from Yuder’s expectations.

He must have been worried about how serious it would be to keep it a secret that he suddenly used his strength so much while fighting calmly so far. It’s no wonder he was dumbfounded that the truth was just this.

“So, you’re saying the candies I gave you in the carriage were unexpectedly destroyed during your fight with Aton?”

Yuder nodded slightly.

“And that made you so angry that you used your power to that extent?”

“Yes.”

“And you still have significant resentment towards him because of that incident?”

“…To put it briefly, yes.”

“May I hug you for a moment?”

“What?”

Before Yuder could fully express his confusion, Kishiar opened his arms wide and embraced him. The hug was so strong that Yuder felt completely engulfed.

‘What the…’

His face was buried between a blanket and bare chest, where he could see nothing but pitch darkness.

As he gasped for breath in surprise and confusion, the grip around him loosened slightly, though the overwhelming force remained.

And then, through the pressure, he could feel a heart beating rapidly. Realizing it was the sound of Kishiar’s heart thumping against his chest, Yuder opened his mouth to speak, but at that moment, lips brushed the top of his head.

“How shall I proceed?”

It was a kiss akin to that of a child unable to control their emotions. Lacking practiced seduction or refined composure, Kishiar deeply lamented as he continually pressed his lips against the forehead, hair, and cheeks.

“Truly, what should I do? I am at a loss for how to cope with these feelings. It feels as though I’ve lived in vain. This must be what madness feels like.”

“Wha… What are you saying?” The words came out broken, stuttered in bewilderment as the kissing persisted.

“Commander.”

Though he tried to push away, he couldn’t. Never before had he felt such a disparity in strength, even when they embraced fiercely. It dawned on him that Kishiar had been restraining himself all this time.

Even amidst this, the thunderous beating of a heart resonated, compelling Yuder to seriously contemplate what he had done.

‘What is this?’

The kissing resumed, overwhelming his thoughts. It wasn't lust, but a strange, unfamiliar emotion that sent a wave of heat over Yuder's skin.

Finally, after some time, Kishiar released Yuder. Drained of all strength, Yuder gazed up at a face wearing an expression he had never seen before, radiant and twinkling, as if embracing all the world's light. Yuder found himself speechless, lost in staring at him.

"I apologize. I embraced you too tightly; it must have hurt."

"No… That was fine, but…"

"What can I do? You're too adorable to resist."

"Are you referring to me?"

Yuder retorted, feeling as if he had heard something he shouldn't have.

"Who else would it be?"

Kishiar laughed heartily.

"It delights and endears me that the one who stole my heart became so angry for the first time over a trivial, worthless trinket I gave."

"It wasn't a worthless trinket."

Yuder sharply responded amidst the turmoil, an instinctive retort.

"It was a gift from you, Commander. It was something that shouldn't have been broken, that I should have protected at all costs."

"I know."

Kishiar chuckled again, gently stroking Yuder's hair.

"Even if I still had that candy and could give it to you now, it wouldn't ease your mood, would it?"

Yuder mulled over his words, realizing their truth. Even if Kishiar gave him new candy right now, it wouldn’t alleviate his lingering anger. That persistent rage was not simply because the candy was a rare and valuable treat.

The candy from Kishiar was initially just an awkward token of appreciation. However, after the mission in the west, it had transformed for Yuder into a medium carrying various memories and meanings.

The fact that he couldn’t salvage it, even for a moment, due to a lapse in attention, was intolerable.

Why had he acted that way at the time? There were other ways to avoid the situation, but why had he rolled on the ground? If he had realized his pocket was torn, it wouldn’t have gone that far… Beneath these thoughts lay the disappointment of not having protected a cherished memory-laden item.

Even after knocking Aton down, the deepest layer of that anger that didn’t disappear was a deeper anger and regret towards himself, who seemed to have lost the memories of the two of them by moving stupidly.

But no matter how angry or regretful he was, he couldn’t bury himself like Aton. So it was only natural that his anger flared up every time he thought about it.

What a clumsy expression of affection this was.

Kishiar perceived Yuder’s emotions more clearly than Yuder himself. A smile, brimming with emotions beyond his own control, cascaded across his face.

“That’s why I can’t help but find you adorable.”

Once again, lips descended upon the top of a head. Yuder, harboring a yearning too intense to contain, accepted the brief kiss filled with a regret that could not be expressed otherwise, without bewilderment but with quiet acceptance.

“You must have been deeply upset. But it seems the price has been paid in full, so upon waking, let it trouble you no more. I am not in the slightest disappointed, and that suffices.”

As Yuder listened to Kishiar’s whispered words, their hands clasped together, he closed his eyes. Only then did he feel the anger that had been clawing at his heart gradually melt away upon hearing the voice that tickled his ears.

This time, truly, he let go of everything and fell into a peaceful slumber.”

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Chapter 755

It was dark and cold.

Quiet and dreadful.

In a feeling that seemed to gather all the sinister things in the world, Yuder faintly felt the chilly fingertips touching his cheek.

It was not bare skin, but the touch of a glove made of lifeless, stitched leather. The all too familiar, and therefore dreadful sensation, awakened a negative emotion in Yuder’s faint unconsciousness.

As if recognizing this, someone chuckled, a change perceived not by sound but by the shift in the air that brushed his skin. That strange yet oddly familiar sensation puzzled Yuder.

‘And where am I?’ he wondered.

Yuder opened his eyes. Beyond the hazy view, only the formless, swaying darkness was visible. Whether lying down or standing up was indistinguishable, only the chilly sensation touching his face was clear. Slowly rolling his eyes, Yuder realized that what was caressing his cheek was a hand wrapped in a white leather glove.

Yes, it was a hand.

There was no body where it should have been attached. The hand, which was alone in the darkness as if someone had cut it off, was much larger than an ordinary person’s and was strangely beautiful.

And Yuder had seen that glove before.

He could only recall that fact, not where he had seen it. As he stared blankly, the fingers moved again, brushing his cheek. The touch, cold and corpse-like, sent shivers down his spine, triggering a flood of memories.

It was an object Yuder had touched and felt countless times, even familiar with the minute feel of its stitched leather. Yet, it shouldn't have been here.

Because…

'Kishiar.'

The name echoed faintly in his mind and then faded away.

Yes, those white gloves always adorned the hands of a man who concealed his bare skin until his last breath. The hands that had gripped and clawed at Yuder but never parted from him, their smell, their texture…

As soon as he remembered that, Yuder smelled a rancid blood scent, stale dust, and rotten stench at the same time. The moment he swallowed his breath as if he was about to vomit, the hand that had touched his cheek fell away. Then, as if it were a lie, all the smells disappeared and the sensation that was about to boil up subsided again.

But now his mind was clearer than before. Yuder was certain that the glove and hand before him were known to him.

It was undoubtedly Kishiar's hand. But the current Kishiar La Orr didn't wear such gloves. Even at parties, he preferred bare hands, adorned with rings and bracelets. Touching his hand, one would feel warm blood flowing through smooth, firm skin, not the cold leather.

Those were the hands of a swordsman, seemingly unscarred yet betraying countless battles upon touch.

Now, they were just a memory, belonging to a man long dead, who never removed those gloves.

Yuder's breath quickened. Silently gazing at the still-fluttering glove, he slowly opened his mouth.

Kishiar.

His silent call flowed out, and in response, the white glove moved subtly. When it touched Yuder’s cheek again, he bit his lip at the faintly wafting scent but did not turn away.

As if sensing his resolve to remain still, the hand within the white glove slowly descended. It gently traced over Yuder’s bitten lips, down his jawline, and finally came to rest upon his neck.

Yuder felt a momentary fear that the hand might strangle him, but no such thing happened. The gloved hand merely rested on his skin, as if to feel the pulsing of his heartbeat.

‘…’

A sudden thought struck him - this had happened before. Yes, definitely. Those cold hands occasionally touched him like this, seemingly feeling his breath or, perhaps, contemplating his death.

Cold and chilling, devoid of warmth, the hand would linger for a while before disappearing, leaving his side.

It was the hand of the man he had killed, departing without a word.

It’s you.

This realization hit him suddenly.

Immediately after, the air around him seemed to stir and change, reminiscent of the laughter he had felt with his eyes closed, yet slightly different.

The fingers in the glove slowly curled, except for the forefinger, which gently scraped across his skin. Yuder, who had been feeling this without even breathing, realized a bit late that the movement had a certain pattern.

It was… letters.

The finger moved so distinctly that he couldn’t help but realize it was tracing letters, and finally completed the stroke of the last letter. Now Yuder

understood its meaning.

The finger-written message read:

‘Correct.’

The moment he realized it was a response to his thoughts, the hand gripped his neck and pushed him, sending his body plummeting into pitch-black darkness.

Yuder closed his eyes in the fall, only to open them again amid unrealistically bright sunlight.

‘…A dream?’

He couldn’t move for a long time, even as he looked into those warm, red eyes. It took too long to regain a sense of reality.

His heart pounded as if gripped by fear. Noticing something odd about Yuder’s reaction, Kishiar, who had been lying facing him, furrowed his brows and gently caressed Yuder’s cheek.

“Yuder?”

As soon as Kishiar’s hand touched him, Yuder stiffened his shoulders and sat up abruptly. The breath he had been holding finally burst out, and cold sweat began to pour out.

“…”

“Yuder. What’s wrong?”

“Commander.”

His voice came out hoarse and heavy.

“Yes, it’s me.”

Kishiar, who had moved to embrace him, hesitated and then stood still, observing Yuder's reaction. He slowly reached out and took Yuder's hand. The warmth of the skin contact gradually brought heat back to Yuder's cold flesh.

Reality. It was only then that the touch felt real, his breathing normalized, and his heartbeat returned to its usual pace.

Only then did Yuder put some strength into his hand and held Kishiar's hand. As he exhaled deeply, Kishiar finally came a little closer and hugged his shoulder.

The unique, cool scent of Kishiar wafted over him, a fragrance only Awakener with a second gender like him could perceive. Familiar and intricately mixed, the recognition of his unique scent eased Yuder's mind.

"Did you have a bad dream?"

"Did you feel anything while I was asleep?"

Yuder asked, wondering if Kishiar had sensed anything through the thread of emotion and connection between them. However, Kishiar silently shook his head.

"Not at all."

"And you didn't have any strange dreams either."

"I had no dreams at all. I just lay there with my eyes closed until you woke up. I thought you were sleeping peacefully, but then you suddenly opened your eyes and stopped breathing. You can't imagine how startled I was."

"…I see."

So, the dream he had was solely his own experience.

It was indeed a strange dream. A dream featuring only the gloved hand of Kishiar from his previous life. Could it really have been just a nightmare?

“Can you tell me what dream you had?”

“…”

Despite Kishiar’s question, Yuder found it difficult to speak. The subject of the dream made him hesitant.

He was still in a state of confusion, unsure if it was wise to speak about something he didn’t fully understand himself. He lacked confidence in providing a clear, objective explanation. Moreover, he didn’t even know where to begin, which was a significant problem.

Explaining in such a state would be fruitless for both of them. Kishiar would try to comfort Yuder in any situation, but Yuder didn’t want him to be overly concerned about his confusion.

Ultimately, the best course seemed to be for Yuder to sort out his thoughts and feelings first.

He raised his hand to his face, as if washing away the dryness, then spoke.

“Can I tell you after I… sort it out a bit? I think I need some time to think.”

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Chapter 756

“Can I tell you after I… sort it out a bit? I think I need some time to think.”

Kishiar, observing Yuder’s pale complexion silently, nodded in agreement.

“Alright. But I will set one condition. You don’t have to talk right now, but continue to sleep here. Is that acceptable?”

It was clear that Kishiar wanted to keep Yuder close and watch over him, especially since Yuder had a similar concern when Kishiar had stayed up all night analyzing a previous game.

Yuder, not wanting to add to Kishiar’s concerns from the start of a new day, nodded in agreement, signifying his consent.

“Understood.”

“And if you feel unwell during today’s activities, report immediately or return to your quarters.”

“I don’t think that will happen, but… I will do as you say.”

Yuder agreed readily, knowing that Kishiar would not be at ease otherwise. Only then did Kishiar’s gaze soften as expected.

“Now, let’s start a pleasant day with a meal.”

The meal was already set in the office connected to the bedroom, a sign of Yuder’s rare oversleeping.

The mornings of the Cavalry usually began before sunrise. Given the nature of the organization where all members followed similar schedules, missing a mealtime presented many difficulties.

However, that was the story of the members who had to take care of their own meals. For Commander Kishiar, it was not an issue. Even in the capital, he often took his meals in the office when busy. Adding an extra portion for Yuder was an easy task.

Others would only think that the Commander and the assistant were eating breakfast together because they were so busy with work that they had to eat in the office without time to go to the dining room. For Yuder, it was a convenient action in many ways as it gave him a little more time to rest.

Yuder steadily ate the many breads piled in front of him and the soup in a bowl that was somehow bigger than Kishiar's, while assessing his physical condition.

Despite oversleeping, he didn't feel fatigued. His appetite was normal, and his body moved as usual. The power of the Awakener in him seemed almost fully restored, strong enough to turn the building upside down if necessary.

He felt relieved that the strange nightmare didn't seem to affect his physical state.

'But what was that dream about?'

It was different from any dream he had ever had. It wasn't a dream of revisiting past memories, and it had a strange reality for a meaningless mix of unconsciousness.

The hand he saw in the dream was unmistakably Kishiar's from a previous life. When Yuder called out "Kishiar," it was as if the hand confirmed it by writing an answer on his neck.

The movement of that hand, despite being just a hand, seemed to possess a distinct identity.

Could it really have been just a dream?

As he recalled the pungent smell of blood from the dream, his appetite vanished. Although he usually ate whatever was given, he knew continuing

to eat now would upset his stomach.

Yuder quietly put down his spoon and finished his meal. Kishiar, who was expected to say something, surprisingly said nothing even after seeing the remaining food. His silent consideration was never more welcome than it was now.

Yuder rose from his seat, shaking off the lingering image of a white glove that still seemed to scratch at a corner of his mind.

From today, when it was a foregone conclusion that he would stay in the south for a while, he had to wear the official uniform again. He clenched his fist, thinking about the uniform in the luggage he had brought from the capital, hoping that he wouldn’t have to wear it if possible.

“Commander, Kurga has returned!”

“Along with Commander Sunz and Deputy Commander Emon of the Imperial Army Special Forces!”

The first to visit the office after the meal were the members with bright faces. They brought news of Kurga’s safe return, who had been out of contact since leaving yesterday under the orders of Kishiar to investigate the death of Herne’s Second Prince. Yuder’s mood considerably lightened upon hearing this.

Kurga, after inspecting the corpse of Herne’s Second Prince on Kishiar’s orders, had been directed to head to Sherpen Port with the knights of the Herne family. However, he had not returned even after all the members and monsters were dealt with, as he should have first come to headquarters to gather members for the journey.

But Kurga wasn’t the only one who hadn’t returned. The knights of the Herne family who left with him, as well as Commander Sunz and Deputy Commander Emon of the Imperial Corps, also hadn’t returned, a fact that was only belatedly realized to everyone’s surprise.

The late realization of Sunz and Emon’s absence was ironically due to the excessive trust between the Cavalry and the Imperial Army Special Forces amidst the sudden chaos.

Kishiar and Yuder, along with the Cavalry side, had assumed that the two would have returned on their own after confirming the corpse of Herne’s Second Prince. Even when they were not seen, it was naturally assumed they had either stepped away to report to General Gino due to the recent events or were briefly elsewhere for other matters.

Conversely, the Imperial Army thought Sunz and Emon, who hadn’t returned since going to confirm the corpse, had been asked to step away by the Cavalry side. Their absence was not immediately noticed as the collaboration with the Cavalry in battle went smoothly without them, and there was no room to consider their absence in the immediate aftermath of the fight.

The members of the Imperial Army only began to find the prolonged absence of their Commander and Deputy Commander strange after learning of Kurga’s absence.

Both sides had trusted that any issue would be immediately communicated, which ironically led to the late realization of the problem.

Kishiar, upon learning of the absence of Sunz and Emon through the hurriedly arriving Imperial Army members, focused on the commonality that all those who hadn’t returned had gone together to confirm the corpse of Herne’s Second Prince.

‘Sunz and Emon, as well as Kurga, were all supposed to return to the Cavalry first. It would have been natural for them to ride together with the knights of the Herne family. It’s highly likely that something happened in the process.’

Kishiar ordered several members of the Imperial Army and the Cavalry to investigate the route from where Herne’s Second Prince’s body lay to the Cavalry branch, as well as the direction towards Sherpen Port where Kurga

was originally headed. The safe return of Kurga, Sunz, and Emon seemed to fortunately confirm his speculation.

Soon, the large, bear-like figures of Kurga, Sunz, and Emon entered the office.

“Kurga Sing, reporting my return.”

“Commander Sunz and Deputy Commander Emon of the Imperial Army have come to greet the Commander of the Cavalry.”

Yuder quietly scrutinized the three, each taking turns to greet. Their appearance, disheveled and clearly just returned, bore evidence of their ordeal, bandaged from various injuries.

‘Fortunately, it seems there were no serious injuries. From the looks of it, they must have met with the priests for treatment immediately upon arrival.’

“It’s a relief to see everyone returned safely. I know you must be weary, but could you tell us what happened yesterday?”

“Yes, of course.”

Kurga, adopting a formal stance, saluted in the manner of the Cavalry and then briefly reported the events that had transpired.

“Yesterday, I was ordered by the Commander to recruit five more members of the Cavalry and accompany the knights of the Herne family to Sherpen Port to investigate the death of the second prince. Thankfully, Commander Sunz and Deputy Commander Emon offered their assistance as well. We initially planned to head to the Cavalry first, but one of the Hern knights insisted that we should not wait to gather more Cavalry members and should go directly to Sherpen Port. So…”

Kurga’s account was almost similar to what Kishiar had anticipated, yet with some differences. The one who had altered their course, originally

planning to stop at the Cavalry before heading to Sherpen Port, was a stubborn knight of the Herne family, Radel.

He was adamant about not waiting for the Cavalry and insisted on going straight to Sherpen Port. Kurga, Sunz, and Emon thought this could compromise the impartiality of the investigation, leading to a disagreement.

Eventually, Radel left for Sherpen Port in anger, and Kurga, Sunz, and Emon had no choice but to follow him. Their best decision at that time was to go ahead to Sherpen Port to monitor Radel's movements and then recruit people from the Cavalry branch.

"But… on our way to Sherpen Port, we realized that Sir Radel's actions were suspicious."

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Chapter 757

“But… on our way to Sherpen Port, we realized that Sir Radel’s actions were suspicious.”

Sir Radel had insisted on going to Sherpen Port ahead of everyone else, deeming it a waste of time to wait for the Cavalry. However, when Kurga and his companions arrived at the port, slightly later, there was no sign of Sir Radel conducting any investigation.

Had Sunz, who possessed vision abilities, not exerted his powers to discover the carriage Sir Radel rode in hidden inside a building, Kurga might have missed his movements entirely.

“It was the building of the security force responsible for Sherpen Port. At first, it seemed a reasonable place for Sir Radel to visit, but Commander Sunz realized that he wasn’t there,” he explained.

Even though they claimed to be conducting an investigation just like Sir Radel, the port’s security force refused to let Kurga and his party enter, repeatedly demanding proof of their identities.

It was Emon who came up with a solution. He distracted the guards at the entrance and instructed Sunz to count the number of people inside the building. Although it was difficult for Sunz to use his powers to discern details, determining the number of people moving around inside was quick and easy.

Sunz discovered that there were only four people inside the security building, which was inconsistent with the expected numbers. Sir Radel’s party, including the knights he led and the security staff, should have totaled more than four.

“The presence of the carriage without people around, and their refusal to let us in, seemed suspicious. We began to investigate the port on our own, suspecting Sir Radel’s involvement.”

Sherpen Port, being smaller in scale compared to the other ports in Charloin, primarily served the local fishermen rather than trade ships. This made the search area for Kurga's party fortunately limited.

"Of course, the investigation was not easy. The fishermen viewed us with suspicion and did not cooperate, and we even had a confrontation with patrolling security officers. However, in the end, we found Sir Radel at a fish farm, hidden in a corner of the port."

Their discovery at the fish farm was almost a stroke of luck.

During the investigation, Kurga encountered an elderly man slowly repairing a broken net and trap. The old man appeared frail, hard of hearing, and forgetful, repeatedly mending and undoing the same part of the net. Kurga, drawing upon his experience as a fisherman's son from the empire's southern regions, decided to help him with the repairs.

It was during their casual conversation that Kurga stumbled upon an unexpected clue.

"The net is badly torn. I heard this place mainly farms shrimp, but how did it get this damaged?"

"Huh? What about raising shrimp?"

"Shrimp, sir. Shrimp!"

"Ah yes, Charloin shrimp. I farm them too."

"So, why is it damaged?"

"Huh? Someone tore it and made a mess, that's why."

"Who did?"

"Well, I don't know, Derk. The ones who tore it yesterday might."

"My name isn't Derk… Never mind. Just continue fixing it."

“Derk, don’t hate your father too much. It’s hard to pay taxes just from shrimp farming. When necessary, we simply lend the farm out and turn a blind eye. If the nets or traps are damaged, we throw them away or repair them. We pretend to know nothing about what happens there, right? So, stop being angry and help me finish mending this net. Any traces will be eaten by the shrimp or swept away by the waves. There’s no better place to hide things than the ocean…”

In that moment, as Kurga was mending the net and Sunz and Emon observed, their eyes met. Instinctively, they sensed the hidden truth in the old man’s words.

“Sir, where is your house?” they asked.

“Aren’t you done fixing the net yet?”

“Where is it?”

After confiscating the traps and nets the old man was repairing, Kurga and his companions rushed towards his fish farm. There, they found Sir Radel and his knights already present.

“The shrimp farm was in a remote location. The shrimp cultivation area was filled with signs of havoc, as if someone had wreaked it. Sir Radel was there, removing charred wooden planks and burning them. We immediately rushed in to stop him. But…”

The battle, which seemed straightforward at first, took an unexpected turn. They hadn’t realized soon enough that Sir Radel and his men weren’t the only ones at the farm.

Sons, who had been concentrating all his attention on subduing Radel and his men, seemed to realize something and pointed towards the back of the farm, but it was too late. They were ambushed by a dozen enemies who had been hiding inside, ready to attack.

These foes were clearly of Southern descent, with their distinct skin tone, and seemed like they had not led righteous lives, all armed with dangerous

weapons.

“Were there also Southern merchants there?”

Yuder wondered as he listened to Kurga’s story, and at the same moment, Kishiar opened his mouth.

“Even though there were only three of them, none were the type to easily fall in battle. Nevertheless, the fact that they were injured probably means that there were quite a few Awakeners among them.”

“Yes, that’s correct. Most of the Southern enemies we encountered were Awakeners, and it was evident they had received training. We faced a crisis fighting them and had no choice but to take shelter inside the shrimp farm, barricading ourselves in. However, we were injured and had to brace for a truly perilous situation.”

Among Kurga, Sunz, and Emon, Kurga was the strongest in combat, especially in close-quarters battle. He selflessly stepped forward to protect the relatively less combat-capable Sunz and Emon, resulting in him being severely injured in the back. An injury to the back was particularly dangerous as it could lead to serious complications.

Sunz and Emon, in an effort to save Kurga, waited for an opportunity to sneak past the enemies and lock themselves inside the farm. They remained hidden, confronting the enemies from within. Sunz’s vision abilities and Emon’s ability to sporadically ignite flames were crucial in their short-term siege.

“Did you choose to barricade yourselves inside, believing that support would soon arrive?”

“Yes,” Kurga began, “since we occupied the shrimp farm, we couldn’t just abandon it. The evidence and those we’ve already captured will not be further compromised. I am a member of the Cavalry. In the line of duty, injury is always a possibility, but once lost, evidence is hard to retrieve. In such circumstances, we of the Cavalry never retreat.”

As he spoke, Kurga straightened his shoulders. Despite his disheveled appearance, he looked immensely strong and steadfast.

“In truth, I thought it best to avoid physical confrontation,” Emon added, smiling sheepishly as he chimed in. “But thanks to Kurga’s words, we’ve learned much.”

Unbeknownst to them, a tremendous event had unfolded at the Cavalry’s southern branch. Help was delayed beyond expectations, and they braced for the worst. Yet, they survived like warriors, holding everything together until reinforcements sent by Kishiar arrived.

The Southern attackers and enemies scattered in disarray upon witnessing the reinforcements’ prowess, eluding capture. A few were apprehended, but none from the south.

Kurga wore a slightly somber expression, as if he blamed himself. However, Kishiar, looking at them, spoke briefly but sincerely, “You were the true heroes yesterday.”

“Commander?”

“What do you mean, Cavalry Commander? We merely held our ground. Today, we learned that events here were far more significant. Sending us support in that situation was the truly remarkable deed.”

“I concur with the Commander Sunz’s words,” added Emon.

The three were flustered and at a loss for words, but Kishiar simply smiled softly.

“No, you deserve to be called heroes. Facing unexpected challenges, not fleeing from adversity, and steadfastly pursuing a goal is a trait of only the bravest, akin to heroes. As the Commander of the Cavalry, I sincerely thank you.”

Silence followed.

“Thanks to your endurance, the death of the Second Prince of Herne and the Cavalry’s unjust defamation will be resolved. We will meticulously use the evidence and witnesses you’ve safeguarded. You may now return and rest.”

“Th…Thank you.”

Three figures bowed their heads in a daze, offering their thanks.

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Chapter 758

“Th…Thank you.”

Three figures bowed their heads in a daze, offering their thanks.

Even after Kurga and Sunz, along with Emon, had left, Yuder remained silent for a while. Kishiar, who had also been quiet, turned his head and spoke first.

“It’s truly fortunate that everyone returned safely.”

“Yes.”

“We were lucky this time, but we must ensure such incidents don’t recur. I almost lost General Gino’s valuable new subordinates by my own hand, so we must be extra vigilant.”

Yuder understood that, despite the seemingly light tone, the underlying message was serious.

He didn’t prioritize discussing the outcomes of the mission Kurga’s group had found or the enemies they had missed. Even though yesterday’s events turned out to be a boon for the Cavalry, he did not overtly rejoice, leaving the praises to the individuals involved while clearly taking responsibility himself.

Was it due to the dream he had the previous night? Knowing already the kind of person Kishiar was, Yuder nevertheless felt a complex surge of emotions towards him.

Suppressing these feelings, he spoke calmly.

“Commander, I don’t think you need to be overly vigilant.”

“Hmm?”

“Yesterday’s decisions were the best under the circumstances. Kurga’s injury was due to his insufficient training, not any other reason. If he becomes stronger, even more challenging situations than yesterday’s won’t repeat, so please don’t worry.”

At this, Kishiar’s eyebrows softened, and he smiled.

“Is that so…?”

“Yes. Even looking at the injuries, it’s evident that Kurga has been slacking off in his training since coming to the south. He knows this better than anyone, so once he recovers, I plan to introduce a new training regimen.”

There was no need for lengthy explanations about how they had braved life-threatening situations without fear, believing in their Commander and the Cavalry, or how Kishiar had faithfully answered their trust. Yuder decided to share the responsibility with him in his own way.

Kishiar’s expression softened, whether he understood Yuder’s thoughts or not.

“Very well. Let’s proceed with that plan.”

“Yes.”

“Speaking of which, I realized upon hearing the report earlier, all three of them have grown remarkably. Especially Sunz and Emon - they’ve changed so much since I first saw them that it’s hard to imagine their current selves. Did you anticipate from the beginning that they would turn out like this?”

Yuder looked towards the door through which they had left and shook his head.

“…No. I hadn’t thought of it at all.”

“Really? I thought you reached out to them first because of a connection from a previous game.”

At this, Yuder’s eyebrows twitched slightly.

The first time he met Sunz and Emon was when he went to retrieve the Red Stone. Because he encountered them there, he was able to advise Kishiar about the Awakener soldiers stationed in the mountains.

It was typical of Kishiar to deduce a past life connection from such brief interactions, but he was unaware of the untold aspects.

In a previous life, Sunz and the Empire's Special Forces Awakener Brigade did exist, but their relationship with Yuder was not as it was now.

After a brief silence, Yuder spoke.

"There was no direct connection at that time. However, now we have established a good bond, and I think it would be beneficial for the Cavalry to continue a long-term cooperation with them."

"By saying so, that would mean that there had been similar units within the Imperial Army in the past, but they were not suitable for collaboration with the Cavalry."

Kishiar effortlessly deduced ample information from just a few indirect words.

"Yes, that's correct. To be honest, the Special Forces of the Empire at that time were latecomers compared to the Cavalry, more like competitors. I underestimated their strength and growth, but ultimately, it was the 'ruling faction' at that time who chose them over the Cavalry, so I guess we lost."

At that time, Yuder thought there was no need to be overly wary of a secret unit that was much smaller than the Cavalry and did not engage in any significant activities.

However, in the end, it was not the famous powerhouses who pierced his defenses and neutralized him, but the soldiers of the small Special Forces he had been so indifferent to.

Emperor Katchian chose the special forces, a unit he could manipulate perfectly to his liking, over the excessively enlarged Cavalry and Yuder, and

ruthlessly eliminated Yuder from the equation. Although Yuder's actions were undoubtedly grave, his prolonged torture was likely a result of the intent to extract additional information to further his punishment and to utterly degrade the Cavalry's stature.

All these events became feasible only when it was deemed that there existed a weapon capable of replacing Yuder and the Cavalry.

Thinking back, the taste was still bitter.

Kishiar's gaze lingered on Yuder's darkening eyes. His red eyes also sank silently, but Yuder, engrossed in his memories, failed to notice.

"So, was Sunz in charge of that unit back then as well? And what role did General Gino play?"

"As far as I know, Sunz was the leader even then. I haven't seen it directly, but their backgrounds and the reasons for their selection were likely similar. And General Gino… had left the Southern Army long before the creation of the Special Forces."

Kishiar tilted his head, questioning.

"He exited the game? It's hard to believe that a Swordmaster would perish so easily."

"After losing both of our ruling faction leaders, he retired shortly thereafter. His whereabouts since then are unknown to me. But this time, he hasn't retired yet and has even formed the special forces, so there's no need for such worries."

"I see. Impressive."

Kishiar, lost in thought, rubbed his lips and suddenly let out a bitter smile.

"Truly remarkable."

"Yes?"

“I was just thinking, I couldn’t have so readily brought back those who were obstacles in the previous game into this round. Especially as collaborators who require solid mutual trust.”

After saying that, Kishiar asked Yuder.

“Is everything alright?”

Many meanings were embedded in that question. However, Yuder, in his current state, could respond calmly without hesitation.

“Yes. Everything is fine.”

-

Turning an enemy in the previous life into a friend and ally in this life would be considered insane by most. However, Yuder had no regrets about elevating Sunz, Emon, and their Awakener soldier colleagues to their current positions.

“Of course, I didn’t initially think this would turn out so well. But now, I’m glad I did. Sunz and Emon are good people. All they and I needed was an opportunity to understand and help each other, just like now.”

From the moment he realized it, the slight vengefulness and hostile feelings he had harbored from the repercussions of his past life vanished. He knew all too well that, in their previous life, they had acted not out of enmity towards Yuder but in obedience to orders from above for the sake of success.

Yudrain Aile, who had followed Emperor Katchian to prove himself and protect the Cavalry he belonged to, and had killed anyone on the emperor’s command, was no different from them. The end he met was simply paying the price for his sins.

Yuder did not share this thought with Kishiar, but he added one last remark.

“So, it’s not that great of a deal. It’s enough that this time, I have no regrets.”

Upon hearing Yuder’s words, Kishiar remained silent for a while. Then, after a moment, he stood up with a smile.

“…Yes. But I still think it’s remarkable that you can say such a thing.”

-

The following schedule proceeded as planned, bustlingly. Yuder went outside to check on the prisoners who had been diligently detained overnight by the members, along with Kishiar, and inspected the situation at the Cavalry branch.

Everyone was greatly encouraged by the fact that the Awakener fighters from the underground arena, whom they had rescued since arriving in the South, had been much more helpful in this matter than the members.

Among them, two individuals, Reneve and Cyregina, who were unanimously acknowledged as particularly helpful, approached Kishiar with tired and embarrassed faces.

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Chapter 759

Everyone was greatly encouraged by the fact that the Awakener fighters from the underground arena, whom they had rescued since arriving in the South, had been much more helpful in this matter than the members.

Among them, two individuals, Reneve and Cyregina, who were unanimously acknowledged as particularly helpful, approached Kishiar with tired and embarrassed faces.

“I’ve already heard of the deeds you two accomplished. Even amidst yesterday’s chaos, you willingly exerted your abilities to assist the members. I am grateful.”

Last night, immediately after quelling the chaos caused by the monsters, the most challenging task for the Cavalry members was categorizing and controlling the prisoners. The sheer number of captives, many of whom were injured, posed a significant challenge due to the lack of medical staff at the Cavalry branch and the building’s limited capacity.

Most of the captives were Awakeners, and the members responsible for controlling and monitoring them were too few and exhausted from battling monsters. The situation was no different for the allied imperial army’s special forces.

In these dire times, the need for a power control device was more urgent than ever. Reneve, who possessed the ability to suppress the powers of other Awakeners, single-handedly created a similar effect.

Using her power, Reneve turned the entire basement of the branch building into a suppression zone. The other Awakeners from the arena and the second-generation members who had passed the entrance test were tasked with guarding the entrances to the suppression zone and repairing the damaged outer areas.

While all performed their duties admirably, Cyregina stood out. Her ability to turn invisible allowed her to patrol outside the suppression zone and meticulously check for any escape attempts. She successfully located and returned several would-be escapees that others had overlooked.

Cyregina, with her level of skill, could have easily fled amidst the chaos. Her choice to stay and assist the cavalry and Reneve was a clear testament to her sincerity.

Thanks to them, the Cavalry members were able to get some much-needed rest.

Hearing Kishiar's praise, Reneve and Cyregina exchanged glances. They looked much more at ease than when Yuder had last seen them, especially Reneve, who had dramatically changed her appearance by cutting her hair short, appearing entirely different from her days in the arena.

Hesitant about who should respond first, it was Reneve who finally gathered the courage to speak.

"Thank you. I merely did what I thought was necessary to help…"

"I feel the same… I'm the one who should be grateful for being trusted to assist the Cavalry, despite being under investigation as a criminal."

"Well, hearing you both say that makes me even more grateful."

Smiling at their words, Kishiar glanced towards the suppression space created by Reneve.

"May I ask how long you can maintain that space?"

"Um… Given my current condition, probably…"

As Reneve counted on her fingers, the surrounding members whispered among themselves.

"What? She's already done the incredible by maintaining it all night, but she can continue?"

“I doubt it’s feasible for several days. Maybe one more day, but even that seems challenging.”

“I can maintain it in its maximum enhanced state for about a week continuously without any issues. Of course, when I’m sleeping, it will weaken a bit, so I’ll need some assistance during those times.”

The nonchalance with which Reneve mentioned sustaining it for a week caused everyone’s eyes to tremble as if struck by an earthquake.

“A week…?!”

As astonishment and awe converged in the gaze directed at Reneve, her face paled slightly with tension, worried that she might have inadvertently offended the Cavalry members with her unusual statement.

Yuder, having spent a long time in solitude and still finding it challenging to face others’ scrutiny, subtly shielded her with his body as he spoke.

“Considering that using one’s powers more often strengthens them, this outcome seems natural. If you all cut back on sleep to practice, it’s certainly achievable, don’t you think?”

“What do you mean ‘what’? We were just amazed, not saying we wanted more training!”

“Really? Don’t you want to become as strong as Reneve? With so many enemies to confront in the future, are you truly satisfied with just yesterday’s level of skill?”

The members, already exhausted from the previous day’s events, fell silent at his words. Despite their complaints, they recognized that no one had been harmed yesterday thanks to Kishiar and Yuder’s presence.

No matter how rigorous their training, they always encountered situations that pushed their limits. Regardless of their strength, there was always someone stronger.

Unlike the past, where members would feel despondent or envious upon seeing someone of higher skill, the current members were different. Despite sighing and grumbling, they eventually agreed with Yuder.

“Of course, we’re not satisfied. We’ll become stronger.”

Yuder nodded, acknowledging their determination.

“Good. I’ll teach you a few ways to train while working. Don’t forget to practice them.”

“Ugh… ughhh… Alright… Alright…”

As Yuder walked away, leaving the grumbling members behind, he heard Reneve’s faint voice of gratitude.

“Thank you…”

Yuder hesitated to respond, then turned away. His gaze naturally met Kishiar’s, who smiled wryly and smoothly steered the conversation back.

“The atmosphere has warmed up nicely. The reason I asked how long you could maintain that space was simple. We’re expecting reinforcements from the capital in a few days, and I was wondering if you could provide the same assistance until then.”

“Ah…”

Color returned to Reneve’s face. She nodded vigorously, accepting before Kishiar could say more.

“I’ll do it. Yes, I will do it!”

“Are you sure you’ll be alright?”

“I’ve done this countless times. It’s not difficult for me at all. I definitely want to help those who saved me.”

Reneve expressed her strong desire to assist in the task. Kishiar then extended the offer to Cyregina and the other successful candidates, asking if they could help with the shortage of hands. Of course, they would be compensated for their efforts.

Cyregina readily accepted, and the successful candidates, each moved, received his offer with touched expressions. Those who hailed from the Star of Nagran were especially overwhelmed, realizing that Kishiar remembered each of their names and the events of the previous day. They finally obtained a free smile, escaping the bitterness of having arrested their former colleagues with their own hands.

Yuder watched them and thought that even without a promise of repaying the help received, they would have agreed to aid the Cavalry.

‘Reneve and Cyregina may not seem as close as before, but there’s no need to worry as long as their genuine wish for each other’s well-being remains unchanged.’

After checking the underground control area, he surveyed the ongoing repairs outside. There, those who were absent from the underground were busily fixing the collapsed fences, walls, and roofs.

Yuder’s gaze was drawn to a particularly large figure. With deer-like antlers and massive wings, it was Elpkins. Carrying a load of wooden planks, his flying between the ground and the rooftops seemed both unusual and natural.

‘Flying has become quite natural now.’

Having joined the Cavalry only a few days ago, he had already earned the right to be a formal member and seemed to have grown close to other members, including those at the branch.

“We should offer to help him too,” Yuder mused.

“Yes, his strength and skill with wings will be very useful. He’ll improve quickly at this rate,” Kishiar responded, following Yuder’s gaze.

“Ah! Sir Yuder Aile!”

Just then, Elpkins, having finished transporting materials to the roof, spotted Yuder and flew down with a brightened face. Standing in front of Yuder, his face flushed red, he seemed at a loss for words before finally managing a greeting.

“Hello… are you well?”

“Yes, but why do you call me Sir Yuder Aile? We’ll be fellow members soon, so just Yuder will do.”

Elpkins turned even redder, fidgeting with his hands.

“No, that… I know that… but you’re such a great person compared to me… Can I dare to do that…”

“There’s nothing remarkable about me, so go ahead.”

“But how could I possibly…”

“Haha. Then how about calling him ‘senior’? We’re planning to officially establish such titles between the newcomers and the first-generation members anyway.”

Kishiar interjected with a new suggestion.

“Ah…! That’s a great title! Senior! It’s wonderful! Sir, Sir, Commander!”

While Elpkins couldn’t understand what was so great about the title ‘senior’, he was delighted. He promptly accepted Kishiar’s offer of help and, with a face brimming with happiness, repeatedly expressed his gratitude before flapping his wings and returning to his work.

The hunched, intimidated posture he had due to his conspicuous appearance vanished, replaced by a joy akin to a large, happy dog. Watching this, the shadows left by the nightmares of the night before seemed to completely disappear from Yuder’s mind.

“…”

The work continued thereafter. Amidst the numerous communications flooding into the southern branch of the Cavalry relating to the events of the previous day, there was also a message from First Princess Myra.

As expected, she was deeply shocked upon hearing the news about Knight Radel.

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Chapter 760

The work continued thereafter. Amidst the numerous communications flooding into the southern branch of the Cavalry relating to the events of the previous day, there was also a message from First Princess Myra.

As expected, she was deeply shocked upon hearing the news about Knight Radel.

“I had been quite worried since Sir Radel did not return last night, but I was relieved when I heard the Cavalry were assisting in the search. But to think that Sir Radel himself would be involved in such an incident…”

As soon as Lady Myra received permission to visit the Cavalry, she hurried over, her face showing signs of severe fatigue. Like someone who had lost a sibling, she wore a black mourning veil, but her emotions were not completely concealed.

“Where is he now?”

“We have separated him from the other knights and confined him underground. He is still sleeping soundly.”

“Sleeping peacefully, even though he’s a traitor. Well, the traitors from the Conche Baron’s family also babbled nonsense comfortably, unaware of their own circumstances.”

Sharpness tinged Lady Myra’s voice. She took several deep breaths to calm her anger, then recounted the events that transpired after her visit to the Conche Baron’s house yesterday.

“The Duke’s competent knight had already taken measures to ensure that everyone remaining at the Conche Baron’s house couldn’t escape. Thanks to that, we could have a peaceful conversation.”

When Yuder had visited the Conche Baron’s mansion yesterday, he thought the absence of people moving around or working outside meant that the original owner might not be there. However, the Conche Baron was inside the mansion, foolishly intoxicated alone and unaware of the events unfolding outside.

Confronted by Lady Myra, the Conche Baron rambled, claiming the Southern merchants were just ordinary guests and he knew nothing else. Thinking that Myra had captured the Southern merchants and destroyed his house, he even threatened to inform his entire family of her misdeeds.

“I clearly told the Conche Baron that I knew what he was plotting with those southerners. He might have planned to kill Ashrav and then me, to eventually usurp the Duke’s position, but now that he’s been exposed, it’ll never go as he planned. When I told him that Ashrav’s horse and the servant he had taken were captured, the Conche Baron threw a disgraceful tantrum.”

Regardless of his tantrum, Lady Myra remained unfazed and carried out her intended actions. Her knights, following her orders, investigated the whereabouts of the Baron’s household members who weren’t in the mansion and soon found success. They discovered his wife and children staying at a villa owned by the Conche Baron on the outskirts of Charloin. Most of the servants who originally worked at the main house were also found there.

Through their investigation, Lady Myra confirmed that the Conche Baron had intentionally emptied his main residence, sending his household to the villa under the pretext of a vacation, to provide a comfortable hiding place for the Southern merchants. He was a true traitor who had even sacrificed his own mansion for this purpose.

She gathered all the evidence and testimonies and informed the entire Herne Duke’s family. The Herne Duke’s family, already in shock from the sudden death of the Second Prince Ashrav, was overwhelmed by this news.

Still, even after experiencing numerous events in just one night and hearing yet another betrayal by a knight of her own house, Lady Myra was not

brought to ruin.

“From the beginning, Sir Radel was neither one of mine nor Ashrav’s. He acted like a meticulous man who followed principles and was loyal only to the family, but in reality, he was just one of those bats, cunningly hedging his bets, always contemplating where to align himself.”

If Baron Conche had used the Southern merchants to kill the Second Prince Ashrav, then Radel must have pretended to know nothing, coming out to investigate, watching how the situation unfolded, and playing his part in hindering and covering up the truth.

“It’s good that we’ve weeded them out on this occasion.”

“Yes. Finding those who had killed Ashrav and covered up the evidence is a relief for me. But the thought of how many more such traitors might be in our family sends shivers down my spine.”

In just one day, she had found two traitors within the family. The conspiracy they had concocted was not something that had been arranged overnight but had been prepared little by little over more than a year, chilling Myra’s heart.

Even Ashrav, who was always so cautious, had been brutally murdered while out with a servant he trusted.

What if Myra had met the Cavalry even a day later? She would have suspected them of being the culprits behind Ashrav’s murder and would likely not have come to Kishiar. Then she would have been swept away in the aftermath of Ashrav’s suspicious death, unaware that she was the next target of the traitors.

‘If I had not come to my senses, I too would have been disposed of by now.’

The uproar caused by Cavalry Commander Kishiar and his assistant turning the illegal fighting rings upside down immediately upon arriving in the south had been a stroke of luck for her in many ways.

Myra bit her lip and raised her head.

“Before coming here, I received news from the Herne Duke’s main house. My father, who only expressed displeasure over Ashrav’s death, seemed quite shocked by yesterday’s events. I think he’ll soon contact the Cavalry through Baron Jacob of Charloin.”

“Oh? So the Duke of Herne is finally thinking of making a move?”

Kishiar asked with a smile, and Myra nodded slightly.

“He has no choice. The illegal fighting ring issue has surfaced, one of the heirs is dead, and suddenly monsters have appeared. If news of the traitors within our family gets added to that, my father will have to step in.”

“We should hope it’s good news for us.”

“If the Herne family doesn’t want to lose their influence in the south, they have to. I told them in my message to the family that the Cavalry had done everything we couldn’t, implying that they can’t stay back as they have been until now.”

It was a direct statement, typical of Myra’s character.

“Hmm. Wouldn’t that kind of talk rather anger the Duke of Herne’s side?”

“Let him be angry if he want to. My position is not so weak that it will be shaken by that much. I was the one who collaborated with the Cavalry to solve this issue, and I was the one who helped with the cleanup in Charloin. The fact that I’m not involved in Ashrav’s death has been clearly established, so there’s no reason for me to weaken. I must seize this opportunity while I can.”

After saying so, Myra boldly made her proposal.

“And now that it’s clear the Cavalry did not kill Ashrav, please open your doors again and resume your activities freely. There are still illegal fighting rings to be dealt with and the fools caught from them need to be

investigated. I, Myra El Herne, pledge my name to assist you in whatever way I can.”

As Myra had predicted, that afternoon, Baron Jacob, the lord of Charloin, paid a visit. Contrary to his previous absence despite news of the Cavalry Commander’s arrival, as if his past behavior were a lie, he greeted with a respectful demeanor, then bowed deeply in apology.

“My health has been poor, which regrettably delayed my visit to you, Duke Peletta. I was already aware of the deeds the Cavalry has done in Charloin, and I have come, albeit late, to express my gratitude.”

He was already informed of what the Cavalry had accomplished in Charloin. It was baffling that he knew yet hadn’t come earlier, but the news he brought wasn’t particularly bad for the Cavalry.

“The illegal fighting rings have been a major headache for us, but those involved were cunning enough to avoid being rooted out. I’ve heard the Cavalry intends to investigate these rings to find oppressed Awakeners, and we will aid in this task.”

Though it was absurd, knowing that he and the city guards had colluded with the organizations running these illegal rings, it was a relief they wouldn’t hinder future endeavors.

However, Baron Jacob’s purpose wasn’t solely such positive news. After expressing thanks for the monsters they had slain and asserting their own lack of responsibility, Baron Jacob subtly added something more.

“However, I’ve heard there might have been some misunderstandings regarding those apprehended in the illegal fighting ring this time… Perhaps, could you show some leniency in this matter?”

“I must confess, my understanding is a bit lacking here. Were there any among those the Cavalry apprehended who were caught due to a misunderstanding? Who exactly are you referring to?”

Kishiar laughed in a carefree manner as he responded.

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Chapter 761

“I must confess, my understanding is a bit lacking here. Were there any among those the Cavalry apprehended who were caught due to a misunderstanding? Who exactly are you referring to?”

Kishiar laughed in a carefree manner as he responded.

Recently, he had slowly been revealing his true nature and started using his concealed powers. However, only a few, either enemies who had directly witnessed this or allies who had fought alongside him, truly knew of his capabilities. Baron Jacob, unaware of the exact role Duke Peletta played in the Cavalry’s various accomplishments, smiled wryly.

“Ha-ha, I heard that a few young nobles from Charloin were mistakenly arrested at an illegal fighting ring they had stumbled upon.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Yes. I’m well acquainted with the parents and families of those young men. They all hail from longstanding noble houses in the south, people of duty. And the youths, whom I’ve observed since childhood, are not the sort to cause such trouble. From what I’ve heard, their arrest was merely a misunderstanding.”

Baron Jacob lamented the unfortunate fate of these young nobles, caught at an illegal fighting ring. Essentially, he argued that these nobles were just innocent victims misled by the malicious criminal Nukijo and his gang, and it was unfair to treat them as criminals just because they were caught while fleeing.

“Since that day, those young men haven’t even seen their families. The Cavalry, citing a thorough investigation, hasn’t allowed any visitors. Such harsh treatment seems overly severe for those already weakened in body and spirit by the chaos. I earnestly implore Duke Peletta to show compassion and release them.”

Kishiar observed Baron Jacob’s earnest demeanor, which seemed far more genuine than when he had offered apologies and promised cooperation to the Cavalry.

“Such unfortunate souls, I had no idea. If what you say is true, it’s only right to release them immediately. May I know their names?”

“Certainly.”

Baron Jacob quickly listed several names, visibly relieved. After hearing them, Kishiar hummed thoughtfully and turned to Yuder.

“ASsistant.”

“Yes.”

“Bring me the visitor records of those arrested at the illegal fighting ring.”

“Duke Peletta, visitor records?”

“If your words hold true, these wronged individuals wouldn’t normally frequent a gambling den, right? Fortunately, Nukijo meticulously recorded details of his frequent guests at his fighting ring - names, visit frequencies, gambling wins and losses, even items pledged as collateral for debts.”

As Kishiar continued with a sly tone, Baron Jacob’s face involuntarily twitched, his muscles betraying his controlled exterior. He asked, with a look of disbelief,

“Is there really such a record? I’ve never heard of such a thing…”

“Oh, didn’t you know? I instructed that this information be shared immediately with the knights of Charloin when they come to assist in the investigation. Seems they haven’t received it.”

It was an expected revelation. The Lord of Charloin had deliberately ignored all actions of the Cavalry and hadn’t cooperated in their investigations. Naturally, he wouldn’t have known about Nukijo’s secret ledger discovered by the Cavalry.

Yuder immediately moved to retrieve a copy of the secret ledger of Nukijo from his office, where it was being stored. This clandestine record, unearthed by the Cavalry members based on the information provided by Cyregina, bore a closer resemblance to a book of nobles' transgressions kept by Nukijo in case he was caught someday.

Upon seeing the enormous thickness of the document, Baron Jacob's face turned pale.

"How in the world did you come across such an item…? Is this truly an authentic record?"

"Ha, Baron, you are indeed meticulous. No need to worry. This ledger was discovered in a hidden safe within the fighting arena, revealed to us by one of Nukijo's subordinates. It's easy to verify, as it contains the signatures and evidence of the guests involved in the gambling house, as well as the collateral items left in exchange for the lost money and the outstanding amount."

"But… Your Highness, just a moment…!"

"Assistant, I'll call out the names. Make sure to check carefully. First, Eneska of the Abkachia family."

Ignoring Baron Jacob's words, Kishiar loudly called out the name. Yuder quickly found the first name on the guest list.

"Eneska Abkachia. You visited Nukijo's gambling house 79 times. You left a handwritten note and seal promising to repay a debt of about three thousand gold."

"Ah, 79 times. That's almost once or twice a week at the gambling house. Remarkable."

"Duke Peletta, Your Highness! There's a misunderstanding here…!"

"Second, Malone of Obrayna."

Kishiar, without losing his smile, called out the next name.

“You visited 132 times. Not just the second floor of the gambling house, but the first floor as well, sometimes twice a day. You left a swan-carved earring as collateral.”

“It seems that person wasn’t tricked into coming. Third then? Coles of Salmaka.”

“32 visits with a debt of four thousand. And…”

“And? What is it? Your serious expression suggests some misunderstanding about that person?”

“No. I was thinking about whether to read the part where I made a ‘small protest’ because he did not show courtesy to the Commander, which was added to the additional investigation part of the Cavalry.”

“Ah, I see. Not that person either? Then what about Giuseppe of Conkereme?”

“231 visits…”

“At that rate, it’s like living at the gambling house rather than home. I would believe if you said that person lured others there. Next, Tashkin of Pantan?”

“58…”

“Nigel of Azulik?”

“61…”

Indeed, they were all worthy of being Nukijo’s top guests. Not a single one to be excluded, each’s visit count and past deeds were precious gems in their own right.

As Kishiar called out the names, Yuder would respond, and Yuder’s response would be followed by Kishiar’s seemingly regretful comments, after which he would call the next name. Their conversation flowed

seamlessly, back and forth as if rehearsed. Listening to this, Baron Jacob's face turned bright red, then completely ashen.

What was this situation? Just listening was enough to make one's head spin and breath short. Yet Kishiar continued to recite the long list of names without pause.

Was this the same man who had laughed off not remembering things like a carefree idler?

Baron Jacob suddenly remembered the command he had received from Duke Herne before coming here.

"Go to the Cavalry and apologize for our mistake. There's no need to grovel excessively, but a show of sufficient politeness is necessary. Promise them our full cooperation going forward, and based on that, find out what they have in their possession. Especially remember, we must not let them continue to investigate the traitors of our house."

It was true that the Cavalry had handled various matters, won over the hearts of the Charloin people, and even discovered the traitors of the Herne family in the process. Left unaddressed, this would only expose the Herne family's skeletons to those who had just stumbled upon them. Duke Herne seemed to have decided that he could no longer afford to lose more to the Cavalry.

Reluctantly, but loyal to Duke Herne, Baron Jacob followed the command. His only problem was that he had underestimated the opponent and let his personal greed get the better of him before fully achieving his objective.

'I spoke too soon without even checking what cards the Cavalry held. How could I make such a foolish mistake…!'

He shouted, biting his lip.

"Please, that's enough, Your Highness!"

“Hm? We’re not done yet. Didn’t you say you came to find those who are wronged?”

“I think that’s enough! I understand now.”

“What do you mean?”

Kishiar asked, blinking his eyes. Baron Jacob had been somewhat excited to meet the notorious fool of the imperial family, famous for his handsome face, but seeing him make such expressions only sent shivers down his spine.

“I suppose I’ve been misled by listening only to close acquaintances. If there are those who deserve punishment, then they should certainly receive it. But there’s no need to confirm anything beyond that.”

“We’re not finished yet.”

“Please, I beg of you, stop…”

“That won’t do, Baron. I made an effort to find the innocent ones, thinking that even though I caught them myself, my memory might have been wrong, and you’re trying to end it with just one word that you were misled?”

“But…!”

Truth be told, Baron Jacob never thought the nobles caught at Nukijo’s gambling house were innocent. Good and righteous? They were the fools who were famous even in Charloin’s noble society.

Still, he had hoped to gain favor by standing up for the nobles he knew and thought releasing the young nobles from the Cavalry would earn their cooperation-a win-win situation.

Suddenly, to be caught off-guard and manipulated like this.

Though unjust, he had no choice. Not only had he failed to achieve his goal, but he was also unable to follow Duke Herne’s command. All Baron Jacob

could do was sweat profusely.

If Duke Peletta were to reveal his attempt at self-serving to Duke Herne, it would undoubtedly lead to unfavorable consequences. He had to prevent that at all costs.

“Absolutely not. I was wrong. My words were merely the result of my own stupidity, not in any way convergent from Duke Herne’s intentions. Please, retract your anger. I, Jacob, will do my utmost to assist the Cavalry and Your Highness in all that you wish. So…”

Kishiar, looking at Baron Jacob, smiled and lay back half in his chair, laughing like a clueless fool.

“Alright. If you say so, I’ll believe you. Now, let’s go over our discussion again. It seems we have a lot to talk about.”

Baron Jacob left, thoroughly shaken, after providing the ‘full cooperation’ details to the Cavalry. He left the traitors of the Herne family in their hands, fulfilling the very purpose he had set out to avoid.

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Chapter 762

In the ensuing days, the hours passed in a blur, too quick to even catch one's breath. When night fell and Yuder arrived at Kishiar's lodging, an involuntary tension swelled within him. However, the man who had insisted on Yuder staying by his side simply smiled as usual.

"It was a tiring day, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Shall we rest first?"

"…"

He didn't press Yuder to speak about his dreams, as if he knew that Yuder wasn't yet ready to talk. Perhaps because of this consideration, that night Yuder dreamt of nothing.

The following days were much the same.

Yuder's mind gradually calmed. Watching the man issuing relentless commands to the Cavalry members, he thought to himself.

'Yes, I must have dreamt that due to the stress of the many battles we fought, and my worry about Kishiar's injury. Still, I can't be completely at ease yet… But, it's a relief not to be continually disturbed.'

"Yuder!"

Just then, someone called him from not too far away. Turning, he saw Yergin Schiller, a member from the southern branch. Since the recent major battle where she had assisted Yuder, she had become friendlier, but now she approached him with an unusually serious expression.

“I thought I recognized some faces outside. The ones who protested in front of our branch before are back, aren’t they? They said they were summoned here this time. Is that true?”

“Yes, the Commander called them. Don’t worry, just let them in.”

Kishiar’s reason for summoning them was straightforward. The branch alone couldn’t handle both the monster aftermath and administrative tasks from the battle. The work had to be delegated, typically to those who owed the branch.

‘And, I’m planning to assign some other tasks to the mages as well.’

Hearing Yuder’s explanation, Yergin smiled slyly.

“I see. Got it. I was a little scared, thinking they might start a new dispute with polite lies, but there was no need for that.”

Wind attribute Awakeners from his past life were known to be more mischievous than other attribute users, and Yergin Schiller fit this stereotype perfectly. Known for her antics within the Cavalry, if she had really ‘slightly’ intimidated them, there was a high chance that they would have been terrified enough to wet themselves. But Yuder simply said,

“Just bring them in cleanly.”

“Aww, of course. Would I bring guests to the Cavalry in tears and snot? How could someone as delicate and weak as me do such a thing?”

“…”

“Ahh, that didn’t work. As expected of the Baron.”

What did his baronial title have to do with this? Seeing him not responding, Yergin shook her head and then lowered her voice, “Oh, and there’s one more thing to report.”

“The Southerners who were brought in unconscious are now awake. They’ve been fed and treated, so we can start the investigation.”

“Really? How are their health and attitude?”

As Hern reported, the priests sent by Lady Herne said they were beaten up pretty badly but miraculously didn’t suffer any life-threatening injuries, so they should be fine. The guys from Star of Nagran are noisy compared to the Southerners who are unpleasantly quiet. They’re under close surveillance except for meal times, in case they decide to die on their own. That… Reneve? She’s also been keeping a close eye on them.”

Indeed, as Yergin described, the attitudes of the captives from the Star of Nagran and the Southern merchants, though captured in the same raid, were starkly different. The Awakeners from the Star of Nagran, mostly having followed without fully understanding why they were involved in this, were quite noisy and disorganized. Their only commonality was a stubborn silence when asked about who had hired them.

‘Surely, this is the aftermath of brainwashing to protect the sage,’ he thought.

On the other hand, the Southern merchants had been extremely quiet since regaining consciousness. Their silence, despite surely being curious about their situation, suggested they had some level of training and knew how to respond to such circumstances.

“It’s good you made sure they didn’t die. The Commander and I will start the interrogation later, so keep watching them until then. If you notice anything suspicious, let me know immediately.”

“Understood. Finally, you and the Commander are stepping in. Those guys haven’t said a word to us, which was really frustrating. It’s a relief.”

After saying this, Yergin didn’t immediately leave but glanced somewhere else. Her gaze fell upon Kishiar La Orr, whom Yuder had just been observing. He was currently in conversation with the Captain of the Charloin security force, Kurga, Sunz, and Emon.

The Captain, possibly having heard something beforehand from Baron Jacob, was excessively polite, his eyes flitting between Kurga, Sunz, and

Kishiar’s waist. It was not hard to guess his thoughts.

‘It seems that the security force is quite bothered by the fact that they didn’t cooperate with Kurga’s party. Plus, the divine sword Kishiar wielded seems to invoke both curiosity and fear.’

It appeared that fear was slightly more predominant. Fortunately, this made the conversation flow smoothly, which was a relief.

“People’s hearts are as fickle as the wind,” Yergin murmured, pouting her lips.

“When we tried to deal with them kindly, they took us lightly. But now, after demonstrating overwhelming power, they’re scared and polite. Still, I don’t understand why they are so reluctant to trust the Commander.”

Yuder turned to look at her, and sensing his thoughts, Yergin waved her hand and added,

“Well, I wasn’t entirely convinced at first either. I could accept the divine sword, but there hasn’t been a case of a swordmaster Awakener. But how can I not believe it when the evidence is right in front of my eyes? Maybe it’s more because of Sir Nathan Zuckerman? He used aura too, right?”

Her guess was somewhat accurate.

While Kishiar had fought using both the divine sword and aura, he wasn’t the only one to use aura that day. The biggest reason people still looked at Kishiar’s waist with expressions like that of the Captain was likely due to the confusion stemming from the rumors about Nathan Zuckerman.

Kishiar had already anticipated this turn of events and had shown a rather pleased reaction.

‘If news of this battle spreads, the fact that both Nathan and I used aura will become known. If there was only one swordmaster, it might have been believable, but two appearing simultaneously seems too unrealistic, making people more likely to think it’s a fabrication. On the other hand, they can’t

completely dismiss the possibility that it might be true, and this uncertainty will give us more freedom to operate.’

However, the rumor of two aura users emerging actually aided in quelling the existing rumors about Kishiar being the new owner of the divine sword. The prior debates over whether Kishiar was the rightful successor to the divine sword suddenly receded in the face of this more shocking revelation.

Of course, these rumors were still confined to the south and would take some time to reach the capital. Nonetheless, ultimately, they would contribute to proving that Kishiar indeed possessed the qualifications to be the owner of the divine sword.

Initially, Kishiar only revealed the divine sword to the public, and later, he demonstrated his own powerful mastery of the sword, thereby rendering the previous doubts relatively insignificant and factualizing the truth. This approach was much more cunning than revealing everything at once, piercing through people’s petty minds and perceptions effectively.

Yuder, keeping all these thoughts to himself, quietly responded,

“…No need to worry. Eventually, everyone will understand what kind of person the Commander is, and what the Cavalry really stands for.”

At this, Yergin’s face brightened considerably.

“Is that so? Hearing your confirmation makes me feel better.”

According to his memory, in his previous life, Yergin was one of many who left in disappointment when rumors spread that Yuder, after becoming the Commander, had killed Kishiar. However, this time, Kishiar successfully revealed his power to the world, and the Cavalry was doing the same, so such a situation was unlikely to occur again.

Yuder quietly gazed at Kishiar’s retreating figure, exhaling deeply.

He then once again pushed away the lingering image of white gloves from his mind.

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Chapter 763

“Earlier, you and Yergin Schiller seemed to be having an interesting conversation. Besides the news about the visitors and the Southerners, was there anything else?”

Kishiar casually asked, handing over a bundle of work to others and preparing to welcome new guests, while perusing some documents.

“The Cavalry might make people flinch with a little effort, but why does our swordmaster, now also the owner of the divine sword, pretend not to know about it? There were complaints about not understanding this,” Yuder reported.

“Oh? And how did the assistant respond?”

“Just as you said, Commander. Eventually, everyone will know, so there’s no need to worry. After all, whether others acknowledge it or not, what we have is real, not fake.”

Kishiar’s lips curved into a small smile. “Indeed,” he mused.

After a moment of silence, he added, “Still, as the Commander, I feel a bit sorry that a member harbors such thoughts.”

“There’s no need for that. Isn’t everything going according to your plan?”

Instead of agreeing verbally, Kishiar silently observed Yuder’s face. Just as he seemed about to speak, a knock interrupted them, and the waiting guests entered.

The visitors were prominent figures: a seventh-rank official from Charloin, a representative of the Sapphire Mage Union, and a merchant of the Charloin Trading Union. They were the ones Yergin had mentioned, the protesters from the past incident in front of the branch office.

“Ah… Greetings, Duke Peletta… We didn’t realize it was you last time and regret any disrespect. We heard you summoned us…”

The three guests were a stark contrast to their previously arrogant and haughty selves, now shrinking in their postures. Despite visible sweat, they were not in a state of tears or a runny nose, confirming Yergin hadn’t lied.

Kishiar opened his mouth with a smile, seemingly unaware of their frightened state.

“No need for formalities. I had my reasons for not revealing my identity back then, and it pained me, but seeing you all healthy and well now brings me great joy.”

“Ah… Yes. We feel the same…”

What joy is there in being bound by an oath? The official, hiding his grim expression, replied as their spokesperson. Kishiar grinned as he spoke.

“Let’s keep the greetings brief. I believe you all have some idea why I’ve summoned you.”

“Is it about the recent deeds of the Cavalry?”

“Yes. We’ve slain quite a few monsters, and we need help with the aftermath. This might not be such bad news for you.”

Initially skeptical, their expressions slowly changed as Kishiar explained the situation regarding the monster corpses. They had braced for a disadvantageous proposition due to their previous intense encounter, but surprisingly, the deal offered by the Cavalry was reasonable and mutually beneficial.

‘This incident in Charloin must be dealt with by someone. If we take charge, we can align ourselves with influential figures, including those from the Cavalry and His Majesty the Emperor. It’s an opportune moment for a check, as our superiors are weary of always heeding Duke Herne and Baron Jacob,’ The official thought.

The mage beside him was also deeply engrossed in evaluating the pros and cons of the situation, ‘The might of the Cavalry we’ve just witnessed, and the power of Duke Peletta, the confirmed new owner of the divine sword. If these are indeed true, it would be advantageous to form ties now. With various powers, including the First Princess of the Herne family, already collaborating with the Cavalry, perhaps we could become the second Western Mage Union and gain fame…’

The merchant’s expression was equally bright with optimism. ‘This is a surefire business deal. Though we are not specialized in dealing with monster by-products, the sheer volume we’re looking at could turn into a massive profit just by distribution. Even if the Cavalry and the Emperor’s forces fall out of favor, we’d only be participating under the pretense of aiding Charloin in its time of crisis, so no loss there.’

This wasn’t about immediately allying with the Cavalry, but rather about seizing an opportunity to gain profit while ostensibly helping their own organization. There was no reason to decline.

‘This is good enough!’

Contrary to their initial worries, they were in high spirits as they agreed to the Cavalry’s proposal and were about to leave when Kishiar interjected, “Wait, would the mage from the Sapphire Mage Union please stay behind a moment?”

The mage, startled and a mix of anxiety and curiosity, blinked rapidly as the others sneaked glances, equally curious. Once the others had left, Kishiar reopened the conversation, “Actually, there’s another matter where we need the assistance of the mages.”

“To us… you mean?” the mage asked.

“The specifics will be explained by my assistant. Actually, it’s his request,” Kishiar replied.

“The assistant…?”

“It’s me.”

Ah, no surprise there! The mage, who had been avoiding eye contact with Yuder, closed his eyes tightly upon hearing his voice.

Even though they were now somewhat on the same side for Charloin’s sake, the prowess Yuder Aile had displayed was still a frequent nightmare for the mage. Rumors following their first encounter about the monstrous feats Yuder had accomplished only intensified this fear.

Like other Awakeners, Yuder was intimidating, but he was in a league of his own. The realization that this formidable being wanted to meet him sent a shiver down the mage’s spine, wondering if he had done something wrong.

Yuder noticed the mage’s anxious expression and trembling hands but remained indifferent, asking expressionlessly, “Could the members of the Sapphire Mage Union investigate the changes in the magic power flow in a specific area?”

“A specific area’s magic power flow…? May I ask why this is needed?”

“It seems related to the monsters that appeared recently.”

“The monsters and the magic power flow?”

The mage tilted his head, puzzled. Before he could ask further, Yuder pressed on firmly, “So, do you think it’s possible?”

The mage hesitated, “We… our alliance doesn’t focus on such tasks, but with the necessary magic tools, it might be feasible.”

Monitoring a specific area’s magic power was usually undertaken by mages focused on research or training. The Sapphire Mage Union, primarily a gathering of less skilled individuals creating profitable magic tools, was not usually involved in such tasks. However, it wasn’t entirely out of their scope of capabilities.

Yuder, having heard that the task of monitoring magic power flow was considerably simpler than casting complex spells and wouldn’t take much

time given the right tools, nodded and turned his gaze towards Kishiar.

Sensing the intent in Yuder's look, Kishiar promptly responded, "Then that's settled. It would be good if you could start on the task right away."

"Understood. Should I focus on the area where the monsters appeared recently?" asked the mage.

"Yes, exactly. Around the Cavalry's southern branch building. We'll cover the cost of the necessary magic tools, so feel free to bill us. Doing a good job will benefit Charloin as well."

"I will do so," the mage agreed.

Although the details were sparse, if it was for the benefit of Charloin, it was not an impossible task. The mage left, promising to bring other mages from the union and begin the work immediately.

Once the mage's presence had completely faded, Kishiar, staring at the closed door, commented, "Needing magic tools to observe magic power flow. That's hardly becoming of a mage."

"It's not about being impressive, as long as they do their job properly," Yuder remarked.

The idea to have the mages investigate the area's magic power distribution had come to Yuder only the day before, while he was reading a letter from Enon. It was full of angry tirades, which reminded him of the hidden pages in the research journal of the first Duke Tain, which he was translating before coming here. He had not finished reading it before leaving and thought to bring it with him this time.

Perhaps thinking about that work after so long had triggered the memory. The contents of the journal, along with Lumas' research and related incidents, brought a sudden insight.

'Enon mentioned that the first Duke Tain discovered that areas with frequent monster appearances typically had distorted magic power flows.

He wondered what would happen if one could deliberately distort the magic power in a specific space. Isn’t that similar to the phenomenon in the Great Sarain Forest, where the magic power has been twisted and stagnated for a long time?’

The Great Sarain Forest, with its long-stagnant and distorted magic power, had fostered abnormal growth and frequent monster appearances, along with the observed strange cracks.

And now, the recent sightings of a new strange crack and the Southern merchants, suspected of summoning them with a magic conduit.

To prove the theory that the monsters were appearing due to artificial manipulation, Yuder suggested investigating the magic power flow. Kishiar agreed to this approach after hearing Yuder’s explanation.

“Regardless of what the mages find, we should base our investigation on the assumption that the Southern merchants are behind this,” Yuder proposed.

“That was my intention as well,” Kishiar replied, standing up.

“But regarding the investigation into this Aton fellow, might I proceed with that alone first?” he added.

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Chapter 764

“That was my intention as well,” Kishiar replied, standing up.

“But regarding the investigation into this Aton fellow, might I proceed with that alone first?” he added.

Yuder’s eyes hardened slightly. His mind momentarily became cluttered. Though his rationality coldly assessed that there would be no particular issue with Kishiar investigating alone, the heart does not always follow reason.

He impulsively spoke up, “Why? Is it because of what I did before…?”

“If you’re asking whether this is because you used excessive force against that person, then no,” Kishiar interrupted before Yuder could fully articulate his concerns, effectively quelling his anxiety.

“I’ll have Nathan behind me, so don’t worry about my safety. Meanwhile, please take charge of investigating the others. With so much to do, wouldn’t it be better to divide the tasks between two people?”

With a logical yet warm voice, Kishiar suggested they share their findings immediately after the investigation was concluded. Yuder, looking into Kishiar’s eyes, nodded his agreement.

“I understand. I will do so.”

Normally, he would not be overly concerned with such matters. It was common for them to move separately as needed.

Yet, the moment Kishiar seemed to be distancing him, a sharp anxiety pricked him. Was it because of the white gloves he had recalled again after hearing Yergin’s words earlier?

It was a dream that surely had no bearing on the current reality. While the cause was unknown, he was managing his daily life well enough. He hadn't left meals unfinished or lacked sleep since then.

Still, there were moments when he fleetingly felt the sensation of that white leather caressing his skin, casting a shadow over his mind like the time he knelt before the guillotine.

'Is it that what I consciously think and what lies in my subconscious are different?'

Indeed, the fact that he had yet to speak to Kishiar about that dream was proof enough that he hadn't completely moved past its effects. It must be showing to Kishiar as well. Rubbing his temples, Yuder turned away.

'…When Enon comes, I should ask about that dream too.'

-

Yuder, accompanied by Kurga and Yergin, descended underground to investigate the Awakener members of the Star of Nagran. The first person he singled out for questioning was naturally Sera, the head of the southern base.

'The successful candidates from the Star of Nagran unanimously pointed to her as holding the most crucial information. My thoughts align with that.'

But there was another reason for choosing her.

Sitting in the makeshift interrogation room, Yuder waited. Soon, Sera was brought in by Kurga and Yergin. Despite having done nothing but recover from her injuries, her face appeared significantly worn from mental distress.

Yuder maintained silence even after she took the seat opposite him. Sera, terrified and anxious at being investigated by 'Yuder Aile,' couldn't endure the silence and spoke first.

"Kill me quickly if you're going to!"

‘Exactly as I anticipated.’

Her guilt was clear. Regardless of who had ordered her, by attacking Kishiar, she could not escape the crime of attempting to harm a member of the imperial family. Knowing this, the unexpected silence must have been even more terrifying for her.

And that was exactly what Yuder had hoped for.

He finally spoke quietly, his fist clenched so tightly it turned white, to Sera, who glared at him with a fierce intensity.

“So, you think you’ve committed a crime worthy of death.”

His voice was slow and cold, seemingly no different from his usual tone at first listen. However, the reaction of those present told a different story. Sera shuddered as if touched by ice, and even Kurga and Yergin, standing a bit behind, guarding her, momentarily tensed at his words.

It was dreadfully cold and frightening. Pure fear permeated the space.

With Reneve’s suppression abilities spread throughout this underground level, it wasn’t due to the use of power. But his voice, devoid of emotion, and his eyes, dark and alien even to his allies, were more than enough to instill fear in others.

This was the method used by Yudrain Aile, the Commander of the Cavalry in his previous life when interrogating criminals.

“You incited many comrades to ambush the Cavalry Commander’s path, believing you could escape unidentified. When that failed, you attacked the Cavalry and the Imperial Army, leading to your current predicament.”

His voice, suffocating even to listen to, flowed slowly.

“So, we have attempted regicide, obstruction of official duties. Colluding with suspicious Southerners causing monster outbreaks, thus threatening and harming the entire empire. In other words, treason against the state. Then there’s assault, injury, fleeing, slander…”

With each charge listed, the tips of his fingers, wrapped in black gloves, tapped lightly on the desk. Even this seemingly meaningless action caused Sera to feel a tightening in her chest.

“If there’s any part of this you’d like to deny, go ahead and speak.”

Sera barely managed to open her trembling lips.

“I… It wasn’t my idea. I was, just, deceived!”

“Deceived? By whom?”

“Southerners. Those Southerners, they tricked me, us. It’s all their fault. We-we didn’t even know who was inside. We were just supposed to attack and then retreat…”

No, she knew exactly who was inside. It was a choice born of greed, hoping to harm the Cavalry Commander, assist the Sage, and mutually benefit with the like-minded Southern merchants.

But those damned Southerners were already dead. So, was there any need to speak the truth? As she rambled, shifting all blame onto the Southerners, she suddenly met his abyss-like gaze and her voice involuntarily trailed off.

It was a look that didn’t believe a word she said. From the start, her lies had never taken hold. He was just observing her reaction.

‘…Could it be, he already knew everything?’

It was an absurd thought. Yet, the moment she saw those eyes, a certainty and fear enveloped her entirely. In the face of that terrifying presence, like a wave ready to engulf at any moment, she finally closed her mouth.

In the ensuing silence, Yuder spoke again.

“Why. Keep talking.”

“…”

“Nothing more to say?”

“…”

“Don’t think I know nothing. One lie was enough. There won’t be a second chance. Look me in the eyes and speak the truth.”

“I… I don’t want this. Let me go. Let me go! I’ll tell someone else!”

Sera abruptly stood up, attempting to flee. Thanks to Reneve’s power, there was no need to physically restrain her, so her limbs were not bound. Kurga and Yergin moved to catch her, but Yuder stopped them with a gesture.

“Let me out! Save me!”

She pounded on the locked door in extreme terror, even though Yuder had not laid a hand on her. As his slow footsteps approached her, Sera felt a surge of emotion, as if she were about to cry.

His footsteps halted right behind her. Unwittingly, Sera slid to her knees and pleaded in a collapsed heap.

“Please… I’m telling the truth… I’m a victim too… Please! I just trusted the Southerners. We’re all just poor, helpless people, wanting… just wanting to live…”

If shifting the blame to others didn’t work, the next tactic was to reveal a pitiable state to elicit sympathy. But Yuder remained unmoved, no matter how pitifully she spun her tales or wept.

He maintained his silence until Sera, tired from crying, barely raised her head, and then he spoke just one sentence.

“So, is that all?”

“…”

“I want to know only one thing. What did the Southerners tell you, and what did they want you to do? Nothing else.”

Sera looked up at him blankly.

In his deep, black eyes, which seemed to devour everything, an intense malice flickered like a river, making her wonder how she hadn't noticed it earlier.

He neither sympathized nor forgave her. No matter how much she begged or schemed, nothing would sway this man.

And if she continued to lie or refused to testify, then…

"…"

Sera felt a chilling sensation at the back of her head and tightly closed her eyes.

Even if she were to leave this place now, she couldn't fully escape that murderous intent. It was a certainty born from the instinctive will to live.

Finally, Sera collapsed to the floor, gasping for air, and bowed her head.

"…If I tell you just that, can I leave here?"

Yuder nodded.

After a while, a slow and proper confession began to emerge from Sera's lips.

It was a victory Yuder had secured without laying a finger on her.

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Chapter 765

After Sara, exhausted from recounting her entire story, was taken away, Yuder remained seated in his place. He intended to wait for the next person, but from afar, the wary glances of Kurga and Yergin seemed suspicious.

‘Seems they’re scared after all.’

In his previous life, those who had witnessed Yuder interrogate with determination had often recoiled in fear. Mostly, these were members of the Cavalry, bound to follow Yuder’s orders, so he never paid much attention to their reactions.

There was one exception when Emperor Katchian had observed Yuder’s interrogation and had a different reaction. But even then, the Emperor had simply concluded, “An unnecessarily prolonged affair that should have ended in torture,” and left it at that.

Yuder understood why Kurga and Yergin might avoid him, especially considering that the subject of his investigation was linked to an attack on Kishiar. He was prepared to go to even greater lengths if necessary.

While Kishiar himself showed no anger, Yuder couldn’t forget the sinking feeling in his heart when he first heard of the attack.

The current members of the Cavalry were not incapable of conducting investigations, but their lack of experience and the brainwashing of the sage limited their effectiveness in instilling deep-seated fear in the numerous and powerful opponents.

Those who attacked had to be prepared to face equivalent consequences. He was determined to teach them the gravity of their actions and the repercussions of meddling with someone like him.

It was fortunate that the subject of their discussion was not present.

“Yuder,” Yergin called out hesitantly from a distance. Yuder shook off his thoughts and looked up to see her anxious face.

“Um… I’ve been thinking, and I’m not sure…”

“…”

“Do we not need to ask Sera about anything else related to the Star of Nagran? I thought you’d ask about that first since you suspected the sage’s involvement, but you only inquired about the Southerners. I was curious.”

Wasn’t she apprehensive about speaking to Yuder?

A flicker of confusion briefly warmed his cold heart. Yuder gazed at her, assessing her intentions, before responding.

“The rest is either already known to the Commander and me, or we have ways to find out. However, the intentions of the Southerners remain uncertain,” he explained.

Yergin nodded, seemingly understanding the priority.

“See, Kurga? They already knew everything.”

“Uh…”

Kurga, always a man of few words, scratched his head and muttered, making it hard to discern if he was scared or not.

Yuder hesitated, then asked, “Is that all you wanted to say?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“…”

Was it really not a big deal to her? Slightly confused but with nothing more to say, Yuder gestured for her to leave.

“Understood. Send in the next person for interrogation.”

Yuder continued his interrogations afterward.

The leader of the central base of the Star of Nagran tried to attack Yuder in a show of defiance but quickly found himself overwhelmed by Yuder's superior martial skills, unable to lay a finger on him.

Although the leader remained tight-lipped about who had ordered him to infiltrate the Cavalry, he couldn't deny his association with the organization and the fact that he had received orders.

In the next interrogation, Sir Radel of the Herne Family, confronted Yuder, causing a commotion right from the start, demanding to know why he was being questioned. Despite his decayed knightly honor, he was still strong, but not an Awakener, making it a challenging task for the Cavalry members who had interrogated him before Yuder.

Yuder watched his tantrum without moving a muscle. The moment a chair thrown by Radel grazed his hair, Yuder stood up, grabbed the back of Radel's head, and slammed his face into the desk. Since his hair was touched, Yuder could claim it as a rightful defense.

With his face turning beet red against the desk, Radel had to personally hear the dismissal message from the First Princess Myra, relayed through Yuder.

"First Princess Myra and Duke Herne have already discovered your betrayal within the family. The Herne Family has also nearly completed their investigation of Baron Conche's side. You are no longer a knight of the Herne, and no one will come to your aid. Do you want to leave here and face proper investigation? It might be worth reconsidering which side - ours or the Herne's - would be more favorable for your survival."

Despite Radel's cries of disbelief, fear was evident in his voice. He knew that leaving here might actually be to his disadvantage if the accusations were true.

Yuder continued the interrogation, relentlessly pressing down on the back of Radel's head until he apologized. Eventually, overwhelmed by humiliation

and fear, Radel apologized to Yuder and the other Cavalry members and stutteringly divulged valuable information.

He confessed that a year ago, Baron Conche had proposed to make his son the new Duke Herne. Initially, Radel hadn't planned to get so deeply involved, but the investments he made with the Southern merchants, introduced by Baron Conche, were so successful that he found himself unable to withdraw.

This suggested that there were more in the Herne Family, like Radel, who had been bribed. Yuder informed him that the more names of other traitors he disclosed, the higher the chances that Lady Myra would spare his life. After getting the information, Yuder concluded the interrogation.

"That's the last one…"

"Yeah, that was the last person."

With Radel, the series of interrogations Yuder had to conduct came to an end. He rose from his seat and walked towards the door. Just as he was about to grab the doorknob, Yergin called out to him from behind.

"Yuder. I think someone like you is absolutely necessary for the Cavalry."

Yuder's hand, reaching for the doorknob, paused. As he turned his head, Yergin continued in a heavy, serious tone.

"It's not because you're a genius at devising devilish training methods, but because, when needed, you can be frightfully stern and decisive."

"…"

Yuder silently gazed at her face, unsure of how to respond. Wondering if he misunderstood, Yergin hesitantly added more explanation.

"What I mean is, honestly, I think it's a waste to even feed the ones who attacked our Commander. And criminals like that knight who pretend to be something they're not. Isn't it right to teach those who tried to disgrace our

Commander and the Cavalry a proper lesson? You must have thought the same, hence your tougher approach today.”

There was probably a significant difference between her pure respect for Kishiar and Yuder’s feelings. Nevertheless, it seemed they both deeply regretted the attack on their Commander.

When Yuder silently affirmed her statement, Yergin smiled mischievously, her lips curling up triumphantly.

“Well… I think Kurga, lacking our level of loyalty, found it a bit excessive, but thanks to you, many have finally realized the gravity of their crimes. I’m quite pleased about that. Just saying.”

“…When did I?”

Kurga muttered under his breath, his bear-like face filled with a sense of injustice.

“I just… It was my first time seeing an investigation like Yuder’s, so I was a bit… nervous. I think the same about doing what needs to be done. Don’t make it sound like a misunderstanding.”

“Hmm, let’s go with that then!”

“Yergin…”

“Anyway, you don’t need to mind us. Just keep acting in the true nature of the Cavalry as you always have.”

“It’s not the nature of the Cavalry, but its spirit.”

Kurga corrected her in a tiny voice from behind. Yergin quickly amended her statement with a brazen face.

“Right, spirit. But isn’t nature also correct? You don’t care about such things, do you?”

Whether it was nature or spirit, it didn’t matter. Yuder didn’t care what people called him. What caught his attention were the expressions of Yergin and Kurga. They looked completely different from when they were interrogating Sera. The fear and tension he had assumed they felt seemed like a lie now.

Or was it his mistake, a misconception born from recalling his past life and assuming they were afraid during the interrogation?

Yuder looked down after watching the two bickering lightly.

‘The Cavalry needs someone like me.’ It was a sentiment he had never heard in his previous life, leaving him with a strange feeling.

With that odd sentiment in his heart, Yuder pulled the doorknob. He stopped in his tracks upon seeing the tall shadow of Kishiar, leaning against the wall with crossed arms.

“…Commander.”

He wanted to ask why Kishiar stood there instead of coming in, but was taken aback.

‘Did he hear what was said earlier? Or has he been here since the interrogation?’

“I finished earlier and thought I’d come to fetch you.”

“Ah, Commander? When did you get here?”

Yergin and Kurga, following Yuder, were startled to see Kishiar. The man smiled nonchalantly at them and greeted them casually.

“Just arrived. You’ve worked hard, so go up and rest once you’re done. I’ll head up first with my assistant.”

“Ah, yes! Understood!”

“Then, we should leave.”

Kishiar lightly touched Yuder's back before withdrawing his hand. Feeling the brief warmth, Yuder silently followed him upstairs. Once they were alone, Yuder finally spoke.

"…How did Aton's interrogation go?"

"It went well."

Kishiar replied calmly.

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Chapter 766

“…How did Aton’s interrogation go?”

“It went well.”

Kishiar replied calmly, his demeanor so nonchalant one might have mistaken the topic for something as mundane as inquiring if he had eaten.

“Did you discover anything?”

“As much as the current situation allowed. Perhaps.”

Kishiar was known to be extraordinary, but Aton was no ordinary man either. What had they discussed, and what had been uncovered? Was there anything related to the strange crack in the information he had discovered? Amidst his anxiety and curiosity, Yuder managed to maintain his composure as he inquired.

“May I hear it right away?”

“Before that, I’d like to hear what my assistant has learned first. Cross-referencing our information will be necessary.”

Ah. Yuder slightly furrowed his brow. Asking for information sharing before reporting was an unusual oversight. Even his attempts at staying composed seemed futile the moment he thought of the abnormal crack.

“I apologize for not informing you first. There wasn’t much information beyond our expectations…”

“There’s no need for apologies. I am well aware of how much my assistant is on edge about this matter.”

Kishiar raised his hand, interrupting gently but firmly. Yuder looked into his eyes and nodded slowly.

“…Yes.”

Kishiar once again silently comforted Yuder with a reassuring touch, as steadfast as if it would never falter.

“So, what did you find out?”

Yuder, recalling those he had investigated, summarized the information gleaned from them.

“To start, Sir Radel’s involvement with Baron Conche and the Southerners began about a year ago, following a similar pattern to a previous incident. Now that he’s opened up, it’s likely he’ll soon start naming other sympathizers. As for the Star of Nagran, it seems they were indeed motivated by the sage’s influence, though the southern base’s involvement appears to be due to the Southerners’ reach.”

“So the southern base followed both the sage and the Southerners’ intentions?”

Kishiar asked with keen interest.

“Yes. According to the southern base, their initial aim was just to assist those infiltrating the Cavalry. It turned into this mess due to the Southerners’ temptations and requests.”

“Considering what the informants revealed, they probably said they had helped before and now it was their turn to receive aid. It made sense to harm the Cavalry, which the sage was targeting, so there was no reason to refuse.”

“Exactly that.”

Sera tried to conceal as much as she could about the sage and their own bases while discussing the Southerners. However, having already heard the stories of those who were in the Star of Nagran, filling in the gaps and drawing conclusions wasn’t too challenging.

Kishiar muttered with a slight smile, “After all the effort, to have everything ruined by an unexpected move and the variable of the Southerners… The sage returning home soon must be quite dismayed.”

Though he spoke of dismay, his tone lacked any semblance of sympathy.

“Considering those we captured attempting to attack us in the west, it won’t be difficult to link the sage, and further, to the forces of Duke Diarca and the Crown Prince. And…”

“And?”

“The leader of the southern base seemed genuinely unaware of the strange crack phenomenon. However, from what I gathered, the Southerners never intended to die from the start.”

This was the crucial part Yuder had sought to uncover during his investigation.

“The southern base side was oblivious to the Southeners’ possession of magic power medium, hearing only repeated assurances of a route for retreat after the attack. Even in moments of peril, they kept asking when the promised retreat would happen, only to be told ‘soon’… right before the crack phenomenon occurred.”

“So, you mean…”

“Yes. It seems they deliberately created the crack to escape amidst the chaos of monsters falling from it.”

Who would have thought that a persistent, bizarre crack would appear in the middle of the city, raining down giant monsters? If not for Yuder and Kishiar’s presence, the perpetrators would have achieved their goal without any trouble.

‘Even in my previous life, I never thought such an event could be orchestrated. Back then, I would have been too busy understanding the situation to pay attention to them.’

“If things got rough, they were planning to use the Star of Nagran as a shield to escape.”

“Not just if things got rough; it’s highly likely their plan was to push them into a corner from the start and escape alone.”

“But it didn’t go as planned.”

Looking back, everything was overwhelmingly against the southern base. The Southerners had egged them on to collaborate but barely exerted any effort during the battle, cunningly observing the situation. It was a clear sign of betrayal.

“So… this is just my speculation, but…”

Yuder glanced around before continuing.

They had just emerged from underground, passing the place they had walked earlier. Nearby, Elpkins was clattering on a roof, fixing it. Everyone was busy with their own tasks, paying no mind to Yuder and Kishiar’s presence.

The scene looked peaceful and bright, yet Yuder’s eyes were drawn to the haunting afterimage of the dark crack that had ominously existed right in front of that roof.

Yuder traced the afterimage and whispered softly, audible only to Kishiar, “Their death occurred not just after realizing there was no escape when captured, but after hearing Aton’s words from me. Remember?”

“That’s right.”

Among the many thoughts he had over the past few days, a hypothesis had crystallized during today’s investigation. This conversation was indeed the crux of today’s matter.

“I always thought of those two as linked, but today’s investigation made me wonder if that might not be the case.”

Hearing Aton’s words from Yuder, and realizing they were already captured by the Cavalry, choosing death to protect their secrets seemed a natural course.

But why would they, capable of attempting death at any point after being subdued, choose that exact moment for their demise? Was there another reason?

Yuder recalled the Southerners chanting in their strange language before willingly ending their lives, his gaze dropping. His eyes, heavy with thought, seemed to emit dark smoke.

“The reason they chose to end their lives might have been to hide the truth about the crack, but perhaps… their deaths themselves served as a catalyst, drawing monsters from the crack.”

Indeed. At the moment the Southern merchants perished, monsters emerged from the previously inert crack.

To call it mere coincidence seemed too convenient. It was hard to consider this during the heat of battle against the monsters, but as today’s investigation focused on the Southern merchants’ behavior and actions, their significance became increasingly apparent.

Aton spoke of creating the land of the Black Moon through the aftermath of imbalance. If this land of the Black Moon was where the strange cracks and monsters appeared, then the imbalance must be the cause of their creation.

“In the Sarain Great Forest, where similar anomalies had occurred, the magic power was distorted and imbalanced, unable to circulate properly. What if the death of these merchants and the artifact they possessed were the necessary elements to replicate such a situation in the South?”

“…”

“Put simply, it’s like a sacrificial offering needed to activate a magic circle.”

Yuder remembered watching closely when the Western Mage Union was repairing a magic circle. Operating such a circle required immense magic power, necessitating various materials, including magic stones imbued with magic power.

If such preparations were needed to summon and use something, then those planning to create the ‘land of the Black Moon’ must have needed something as well.

From the beginning, the fact that the strange crack occurred intentionally by someone was something that could not even be imagined before. So no matter how excessive the thought, it was considered that the possibility should not be completely closed.

After hearing Yuder’s words, Kishiar remained silent for a while. It was only after he entered his office and the door closed with a sound, that he finally spoke.

“I, too, had similar suspicions while investigating Aton.”

Yuder looked up sharply. There was no trace of the softness that had been in Kishiar’s eyes before.

“He said that all the conditions had been met and that it would be futile for me to do anything now.”

“That means…”

“I took it to mean that a new strange crack and more monsters will soon appear in the South.”

Yuder’s blood ran cold. Kishiar’s moving lips were the only thing he could see, everything else was a blur.

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Chapter 767

“I took it to mean that a new strange crack and more monsters will soon appear in the South.”

Yuder’s blood ran cold. Kishiar’s moving lips were the only thing he could see, everything else was a blur.

Even a scenario contemplated multiple times can still shock when it becomes reality. All the countermeasures he had considered swirled chaotically in his mind. Clenching his fists until they almost crushed, Yuder spoke.

“Did Aton say this after learning that we had vanquished the monsters?”

“No, quite the opposite.”

“Excuse me?”

Kishiar’s eyebrows drew together as he slightly smiled.

“Aton has been hiding his identity and skills for many years, infiltrating every corner of the empire. He seems to have been performing the role of a leader, capable of issuing orders and guiding others. This means he is likely someone of significant status. You guessed as much, didn’t you?”

Spies sent to other countries come in two types. Usually, they are skilled in infiltration and transformation, blending unnoticed among the lower classes. However, this alone makes coordinated and systematic actions challenging.

Thus, leaders are selected to guide these spies, individuals who can prioritize missions even in danger, possess strength, and would never betray their homeland. In other words, only those of considerable status and background are chosen.

Kishiar was referring to the latter.

“Yes, I am aware.”

“One might think of nobility when it comes to high status, but not in the southern lands. There, the roles equivalent to nobility are ‘Masha’ and ‘Udaquan’ - akin to knights and priests in our terms.”

Yuder recalled hearing that Nathan Zuckerman’s parents were ‘Masha’. They were not merely knights but held a status akin to nobility in those lands.

“Then, was Aton a Masha?”

“No, Nathan believed he was Udaquan.”

“Despite wielding a sword?”

“Southerner priests don’t shy away from violence or arms like ours do. Rather, they are encouraged. The difference lies in whether they use weapons to protect their tribe or for their faith.”

According to Kishiar, Udaquans pride themselves on being the chosen ‘Children of the Moon’. They would rather die than mix with the people north of the desert - a form of extreme nationalism.

Yuder then remembered Aton referring to Nathan Zuckerman as ‘Makunata’ or something, a derogatory term.

‘It meant ‘fragment of a fallen star’, didn’t it?’

“And the Southern merchants who volunteered for battle, the phrase they shouted. It took a while to interpret, but it turns out to be a closing phrase from their sacred texts, akin to a refrain. Don’t we sometimes repeat standardized closing phrases when reciting the Sun God’s scriptures?”

“Ah…”

Though he seldom visited temples, Yuder was familiar with such practices due to forced attendance.

“Inia Kta Inia. In the South, they use this phrase to mean ‘Everything will be as the Black Moon wishes’.”

“When did you find this out?”

“Nathan came to me this dawn. He had a hard time uncovering it, even visiting places near where he used to live.”

Come to think of it, Nathan Zuckerman’s hometown was also in the South. He had been barely visible since the day after the battle ended, and it seemed that he had been away because of that.

Yuder newly appreciated Nathan Zuckerman’s meticulous handling of matters. During his conversation with Aton, he had not only grasped the insulting undertones of the words but also surmised the man’s background, deciphering the previously incomprehensible language to report to Kishiar.

Knowing he was best positioned to uncover information about the southern lands, Nathan’s actions were calculated and deliberate. Despite the south being neither a fond homeland nor an object of deep emotional attachment to him.

“No matter how thoroughly a spy hides their true intentions, understanding their background and status reveals how to approach them. Scratching a priest is best done with theology, and provoking someone of high status with excessive confidence in their skills is best done with the name of the person who defeated them.”

All was well, but something about the last part was odd. As Yuder listened intently, his eyes blinked and his eyebrows twitched, prompting Kishiar to reach out and gently stroke his cheek.

“Yes, the name of the one right here.”

Yuder Aile. Even knowing the soft voice wasn't calling for him, Yuder couldn't help but react momentarily.

In Kishiar's eyes, reflecting back in their shared gaze, lay an unreadable expression.

"As soon as he heard about your significant role in dealing with the recent crack and monsters, he reacted strongly. That's why I heard such words earlier."

"Could it be… that's why you didn't take me with you?"

Kishiar's eyes widened, an unspoken affirmation.

"But I wasn't the only one who faced him…"

"Yes, he fought both me and Nathan. But when else has he been utterly overpowered and buried in the ground, if not during his fight with you?"

Indeed, it would be difficult to have such an experience twice. Yuder didn't usually use such great power to toy a single opponent.

"One more thing to remember. According to recent statements from Duke Tain, the first encounter with him was a few years ago during an attempt at maritime trade between the south and the empire. At that time, other merchants faced Duke Tain, and Aton was in the background. About a year ago, he became closely involved with Duke Tain while preparing for secret trade through the Great Sarain Forest. So, even if born of high status, he wasn't originally a leader of this caliber."

"…So you mean he rose in position within his homeland after becoming an Awakener."

"Yes. The staff of the southern trading company also changed significantly around the time Aton became a leader. Originally not of a position to lead other Awakeners, his awakening allowed him to do so. Imagine the deep pride someone would feel, gaining such power and a higher position

through awakening, despite having a high status but not the corresponding responsibility.”

Kishiar mumbled, lifting one corner of his lips.

“I understand the minds of such people well. That’s why he couldn’t help but react to the name of the person who toyed with his skills.”

“…”

“And such things come bigger when they are not seen than when they are seen. Because memories are sometimes more painful than reality.”

In the midst of uncertainty whether Kishiar was being self-deprecating or joking, his words about memories sometimes being more painful than reality resonated deeply within Yuder. As Yuder pondered this, Kishiar continued his explanation.

It seemed that upon hearing Yuder’s name and his exploits, Aton couldn’t hide his reaction, allowing Kishiar to easily manipulate him. If Yuder himself had been present, Aton’s entire focus would have been on him, so their decision to act separately had been the right one.

“So from now on, we need to investigate where the next crack will appear and what the conditions will be. He won’t tell us easily, but we have to dig out the information somehow.”

“I will search as well,” Yuder firmly responded.

“Even if the mages can’t detect any anomalies in the flow of magic power, setting up a system to constantly monitor various regions will provide us with some means of response.”

“Yes, and there are other methods as well. We need to start seeking cooperation from those around us and continue to prepare.”

Of course, this was a necessary action. Given the magnitude of the situation, not a single person, be it nobility, knights, or ordinary imperial citizens, could be excluded from responding to this crisis.

However, despite borrowing the strength of others, no one could respond as effectively as Yuder, who had memories from a previous life. This meant that from now on, he must be ready to use his power to the fullest, whenever and wherever necessary.

For that, not a single moment could be wasted. Ideas for strengthening and using his power more frequently flashed through his mind.

With a renewed resolve in his heart, Yuder looked at Kishiar. He realized he should talk to him about the contents of his dream as soon as the mages' investigation was completed.

It was then that the sound of tapping at the window reached them.

Perched on the window was a messenger bird from the Cavalry, a message tied to its leg.

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Chapter 768

It was then that the sound of tapping at the window reached them.

Perched on the window was a messenger bird from the Cavalry, a message tied to its leg.

The conversation they were having ended there. Yuder watched Kishiar as he approached the window, letting the messenger bird perch on his finger and retrieving the letter. After a brief moment, Kishiar, having quickly read through the letter, let out a small hum.

“Is it bad news, perhaps?”

“No. It’s not particularly bad news for the Cavalry. Would you like to see it?”

Without hesitation, Yuder moved closer and took the letter from Kishiar. The contents were brief and to the point.

‘We have completed all preparations to depart. So far, there are no issues. However, upon hearing about the sage and our departure to the south, Hosanna has fervently requested to accompany us, proposing a deal. Hence, I am sending this letter. After hearing about the events in the south and the news of the sage, his abilities seem to have significantly recovered. He claims that he can use his powers to reduce the Cavalry’s travel time to just three days. From my assessment, he doesn’t seem to be planning an escape. He appears to be filled with concern for Nahan and made this offer out of that sentiment. What should we do?’

The letter was written by Kanna. She had been responsible for investigating Hosanna, a close associate of Nahan, and had sent several reports in the absence of their leader.

According to her letters, Hosanna’s health had improved enough for him to manage everyday activities without difficulty, but the return of his powers

seemed still a distant possibility.

The news of his sudden recovery upon hearing about the south and the sage was surprising.

‘It must have been a significant mental shock.’

Yuder folded the letter and spoke.

“The decision to leak this information to Hosanna must have been Commander’s, right?”

“Yes. I had told Kanna that she could share any major news related to the Star of Nagran as she saw fit. But a recovery of powers and a request for a deal… I hadn’t anticipated this.”

“Do you plan to accept his offer?”

“What do you think would be the best course of action?”

Hosanna’s abilities were invaluable, and currently, there was no one else who could replace him. If he could indeed reduce the travel time of the reinforcements, which could have taken up to a month, to just three days, there seemed no reason not to accept.

‘Fortunately, we already have a power suppression device, and now there’s Reneve as well. If Nahan is headed south, we are bound to encounter him soon, so keeping Hosanna here wouldn’t be a bad idea.’

If they do end up facing or capturing Nahan, Hosanna could prove to be a useful asset in persuading or luring him. Of course, considering Nahan had abandoned Hosanna and fled alone, this might not be the case.

‘If Hosanna had been difficult to manage or if the speedy joining of the reinforcement troops wasn’t urgent, I would have reconsidered. But that’s not the case.’

Yuder summed up his thoughts and replied succinctly.

“If he can truly increase the travel speed that much, then we should accept. The prompt arrival of our reinforcement troops is our top priority, after all.”

“Right. It’s best to use what we can when we can.”

Kishiar gave a faint smile and took back the letter. As he began to write a letter of approval, the sound of tapping on the window was heard again. This time, it came from another window in the next room.

“…Hmm?”

As soon as Yuder opened the window, he blinked in surprise at the sight of two messenger birds flying in simultaneously. He wondered if someone had sent both at once, but that wasn’t the case. The birds were from Herne’s First Princess Myra and the Imperial Palace, respectively.

“What a coincidence, it’s as if they had made an appointment. Please direct the letter from the Imperial Palace here, and let the assistant check the one from Lady Myra.”

“Understood.”

Caught in his astonishment, Yuder used a slight gust of wind to send the letter from the Imperial Palace to Kishiar and then unfolded Myra’s letter. Although brief, the contents of Myra’s letter were far from light.

“You look puzzled. Has something happened with the First Princess?”

“The Duke of Herne is coming to Charloin. The official reason is for the funeral of the Second Prince, but the First Princess believes there’s more to it.”

“That’s interesting timing…”

“Excuse me?”

Kishiar, effortlessly reading one letter while writing another, chuckled and spoke.

“This one is from His Imperial Majesty. Apparently, Duke Diarca has suddenly expressed concern over the turmoil in the south and requested the deployment of the Imperial Knights. Interestingly, Kiolle Da Diarca, a member of the Imperial Knights and at the same time the Crown Prince’s personal guard, is included as the leader of this mission.”

Yuder doubted his ears for a moment.

“…Who did you say the leader was?”

“Kiolle Da Diarca.”

Kishiar kindly repeated the name.

“Duke Diarca must be out of his mind.”

“Unfortunately, it seems he hasn’t gone mad yet. His Majesty mentioned that he has come to see his youngest son in a new light after the recent incident. He must have felt the need for a thorough investigation after hearing about my aura-encased divine sword.”

To Duke Diarca, a sage remained an untrustworthy entity. Sending Kiolle would allow him to hear about the southern situation directly from his most trusted kin, and simultaneously keep an eye on the sage and the Cavalry while giving the impression that the Crown Prince was personally overseeing the welfare of his people by sending his own personal guard. It was a clever move, if not for the choice of Kiolle.

‘Did Kiolle really leave such a deep impression at that time?’

Despite his doubts about Duke Diarca’s judgment, Yuder calmly assessed the situation and responded.

“Ridiculous as it may seem… it appears to be a fortunate turn for us.”

“Duke Diarca’s decision to send Kiolle and the Duke of Herne’s own visit. I wonder what else might be added to this mix.”

“Could there be more?”

Surprisingly, there was.

Right after handling the two new letters, Sunz and Emon appeared at the office door, bringing news of a third visitor to Charloin.

“General Gino, upon receiving our report, has informed us of his plans to visit Charloin with the Southern Army to assist in maintaining order. Here, a letter for the Cavalry Commander!”

“…”

Staring at the forcefully presented letter, Yuder remained silent. Seeing his subtle expression, Sunz asked anxiously.

“…Um, why are you looking like that? Did we come at a bad time…?”

“No, not at all. It’s reassuring to have General Gino and the Southern Army coming to help. We were going to need more assistance soon anyway. This saves us the trouble of asking.”

Upon hearing Kishiar’s response, delivered with a smile, Sunz and Emon relaxed their tension. After they had left, Yuder, looking at the several letters on Kishiar’s desk, let out a small sigh.

“I had thought about requesting additional support from the Imperial Army, but I didn’t expect General Gino to take the initiative to come.”

“If it’s General Jino, he must have taken the fact that the safe zone of the city where monsters don’t appear has been broken more seriously than anything else. He’s that kind of person.”

A small smile played on the corners of Kishiar’s lips. Yuder remembered how closely Kishiar had worked with General Gino when they had met in the mountains before.

“You seem to have a great deal of trust in General Gino.”

“It’s less about trust and more about… He’s someone from whom I’ve learned a lot since my childhood. I suppose it would be more accurate to

say that I have a strong sense of familiarity with him.”

After saying this, Kishiar’s eyebrows softened slightly as he smiled.

“General Gino doesn’t know that I’m a swordmaster. Would you understand if I said that’s the difference between trust and familiarity?”

General Gino was unaware of Kishiar being a swordmaster. This implied that he also didn’t fully understand the other powers Kishiar possessed.

It was surprising, as Yuder had thought him likely to know. At the same time, it highlighted how crucial these secrets were to Kishiar, stirring an odd feeling in Yuder.

The fact that Kishiar had opened up and revealed these closely guarded secrets to Yuder alone, which he had even kept from a general he had known since childhood, made the responsibility feel even heavier.

The trust and confidence Kishiar extended to him often felt as weighty as love.

If Yuder were to say that this weight, at times seeming to almost crush him, was what kept him grounded and helped him regain his focus, who would truly understand that sentiment?

No one but the person in front of him.

“…Yes, I think I understand.”

The man who heard this response gave a faint smile and then returned his focus to writing responses to the letters. Watching him, Yuder clenched his fist slightly and spoke up.

“Commander, may I step out for a while today?”

“Alone?”

“If you’re worried, I could take others with me, but if possible, I’d prefer to handle this alone.”

With the reinforcement troops from the capital arriving in three days, there was something Yuder urgently needed to do in the meantime.

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Chapter 769

“Is it a matter too difficult to share with me beforehand?” he inquired.

“No, it’s not that…” Yuder hesitated briefly before continuing. “I plan to tour the entire South and return.”

“The entire South?” The quill in Kishiar’s hand came to a halt. Yuder chose his words carefully to explain further.

“In the previous game, starting with Charloin, the entire southern region suffered equally. It’s hard to be sure the same will happen this time, but just in case, I thought it best to check the areas in advance.”

Yuder usually remembered well the battles and missions he partook in, but this case was different. The earthquakes and disasters he recalled in the South were years away from now. The landscape in his memories differed significantly from the current situation in the South, making it imperative to assess the area before any reinforcements arrived.

Kishiar tilted his head, listening to his explanation, and asked, “But is it something you can do ‘briefly’?”

“It’s not a detailed inspection, so with efficient use of my strength, it’s entirely possible even before the day ends.”

The day was already turning to dusk from his various tasks, but this was no issue for Yuder. His vision remained clear even at night, thanks to his Eye of Magic, and he had no fear of unexpected enemies or monsters.

The only problem was the decreased efficiency if he brought others along, as he would need to ensure their safety too. Realizing why he preferred to go alone, Kishiar slowly nodded.

However, this was not consent.

“I see. But it’s not possible right now.”

“I planned to finish as soon as possible, before the reinforcements arrive… Is there something else I need to do now?”

“No, but I still have some work left.”

“Really?”

“Wait until I’m done, then let’s go together. I have useful abilities that won’t interfere with what you want to do, and I look so good, so why do you want to leave me behind?”

Kishiar blinked and smiled charmingly.

Yuder, taken aback by his words, struggled to respond.

“Shouldn’t you stay and guard this place, Commander?”

Although it seemed unlikely that an emergency would arise, unforeseen delays could occur. The trip, which was expected to take about half a day, could be delayed a little more due to that.

In case such a situation occurs, there must be someone to support the Southern branch, so Yuder did not even think about going with Kishiar from the beginning. Kishiar also thought he would naturally judge that way, but his thoughts seemed to be different from Yuder’s.

A depth of emotion rose on Kishiar’s face in an instant. His exaggeratedly trembling eyelashes gave off a deliberately made-up vibe, but even knowing that, his appearance looked miserable like a daffodil soaked in water.

While Yuder was slightly doubting his eyes, the man who bowed his head and covered his cheek with one hand whispered in a seemingly sad voice.

“Incredible… Are the memories of that night, which seemed inseparable, left only here?” he whispered with feigned sadness, his hand gently touching his cheek.

“Really?”

“I feel the rising sun is meaningless without your breath, rooted in this land, while you, heartlessly, move forward without looking back.”

“What?”

“Even if my roots wither away, please, do carry me on your waist. The place from which I am taken will one day sprout a new shoot, but nothing can suffice for the touch of your hands.”

It was only after questioning twice that Yuder finally realized that Kishiar was reciting one of the most famous poems from the empire. It was the tale of a mage from ancient times and the spirit who loved him, so well-known that even children were familiar with it due to its frequent performances by jesters and bards in markets and taverns. Yuder, too, remembered it without much difficulty.

The issue, however, was that Kishiar was reciting lines typically spoken by the spirit, who is often portrayed as a delicate woman.

‘The lines spoken by the spirit when offering its life-like golden apple to the mage, who needed to collect the greatest treasures to aid in guarding the king’s land, yet couldn’t bring himself to kill and take the spirit of the golden apple tree… Wasn’t it?’

That golden apple was the last fruit borne by the tree. Knowing that taking the apple would cause the golden apple tree to wither and die, the mage intended to refuse the spirit’s offer. However, the spirit, assuring that what seemed like death at the moment would not be so, cut itself off and dropped the apple into his hand.

As expected, the tree withered and died upon dropping the apple. But the dead tree became the nourishment for a beautiful forest. Later, when the mage returned to the king’s land and planted the golden apple, a new sprout grew, fulfilling the spirit’s words.

So… Kishiar’s use of these lines now meant that, although it seemed necessary for him to remain here, it was not strictly so.

‘…Is this what he means?’

Yuder was at a loss for words, struck by the brazen yet mournful way Kishiar recited the spirit’s lines, yet also finding it strangely fitting.

And that was precisely Kishiar La Orr.

Yuder finally sighed and nodded his head.

“I understand. I will wait until you are finished.”

“Much appreciated.”

The spirit, who had seemed like a flower shaking the human heart, quickly returned to being Kishiar La Orr. He then began to write responses to the remaining letters and handle a few documents at twice his usual speed, speaking again.

“I thought you might not have heard this story, having lived in the mountains. I’m relieved.”

“I know it well enough.”

“Do you also know the story behind it, where the mage is speculated to be the Archmage Luma?”

Of course, Yuder didn’t. Such old tales had never interested him, and this was completely new to him.

“…Is that so?”

“Yes, indeed. Recently, with the increase in events related to Archmage Ruma, I started looking into stories and documents about him. It’s tough to find credible information on such a mysterious legendary figure, but this one seems quite accurate.”

After saying this, Kishiar lowered his voice to explain the basis and reasoning.

“Do you remember the Hill of Abundance I took the foreign delegates to during the Harvest Festival?”

“Ah… Yes. It was related to Luma.”

Kishiar nodded.

“Precisely. There’s a legend that it all started from an apple tree planted by Luma himself. There’s indeed a small apple tree there, though I’m not sure if you’ve seen it.”

“I think I have seen it, but I didn’t pay much attention.”

Of course, the response Yuder gave was based on experiences from his previous life. The only occasion he would bother to visit such a hill was when entertaining foreign delegates, and Yuder seldom undertook such tasks. As he recalled, he only saw it from a distance when he was closely guarding Emperor Katchian.

“That apple tree is an extraordinary being that lives long, blossoming but never bearing fruit. According to the mages’ investigation, instead of turning blossoms into fruits, it disperses its inherent magic power into the soil.”

“Are you suggesting it’s actually the golden apple tree?”

“We can’t be sure since it never bore fruit. The mages speculate that the tree, due to its unique property of absorbing a significant amount of magic through its roots, was used by the Archmage Luma as a medium, possibly making it one of the foundation stones supporting the seven walls of the capital. This is, in fact, one of the Empire’s secrets.”

The idea that an apple tree on a hill, accessible to anyone in the capital, was actually a state secret of the empire seemed almost laughable under any other circumstance.

“Some say that the First Emperor simply planted it out of his fondness for apple trees. However, this story does show that not all legends are entirely baseless. There, all done.”

As Kishiar finished speaking, he lightly set down his quill. Yuder blinked as if awakening from a dream.

“It didn’t take as long as you thought, did it?”

“Did you tell me that story because you thought I wouldn’t wait?”

“Not exactly, but I do enjoy your company, so it helps pass the time.”

Kishiar rose from his seat and donned his outer garment.

“Shall we go now?”

They went to meet Nathan Zuckerman, Kurga, and Sunz, briefly explaining the situation before climbing to the top of the branch building, near the roof. Yuder, gazing at the moon in the sky, pondered over the stories Kishiar had shared.

He knew of the existence of dragons, fairies, and spirits in ancient times, but he had never imagined that such a well-known story, familiar even to children, was related to Luma. It seemed he had another topic to inquire about when Enon arrived.

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Chapter 770

“Ah, we have climbed to the very top, but now, how shall we proceed?”

Standing atop the roof repaired by the Elpkins during the day, Kishiar brushed his wind-tousled hair aside and asked. Yuder opened his mouth with a trace of hesitation still lingering.

“First, we’ll head to the temple’s bell tower, from where we can overlook the entirety of Charloin. Then, we’ll follow the path leading to the harbor, cross the southern gate, and ascend high into the sky. Our journey will take us through Mclara, Tuban, Sluban, and Alsara before circling back to Charloin.”

These four regions had reported unusual cracks before the earthquake in his previous life. The calamity had hit them harder than other areas, and they were geographically well-positioned for travel to neighboring villages and towns without being too close to each other.

“Indeed. This way, we can swiftly survey the entire south without unnecessary interruptions.”

Kishiar nodded his approval.

“Let’s depart immediately.”

“Are you sure this is wise? Even though you can levitate with your power, control might become difficult at higher speeds.”

Kishiar possessed the ability to lift himself high into the air using a push-pull force. While walking through the air was feasible, moving at a flight-like speed was a different challenge. Merely pushing off the ground required immense strength, and increasing speed would only add to the strain.

However, Kishiar merely laughed with joy.

“Don’t worry. Just think of me as a small pouch tied to your back, and move as you wish.”

“That seems quite a large ‘small pouch’…”

“Then consider it a large pouch.”

There was nothing more to say when he put it that way.

‘Really confident, isn’t he? Since we’ve come this far, there’s no turning back. I’ll monitor the situation until we reach the temple bell tower. If he shows any sign of struggle, we’ll slow down or find another way.’

“Understood. Then…”

Yuder looked down and exhaled. Simultaneously, a golden light flickered in one of his eyes, and the direction of the harsh wind that had been whipping around them shifted abruptly.

Surrounded by a swirling wind, as if an invisible hand was twisting the flow of nature, Yuder gazed at the distant temple roof, barely visible in the darkness.

Moments later, like an arrow released from a bow, his legs, which had been slightly bent, propelled him powerfully off the ground. He leaped out towards the roof’s edge without hesitation. To an onlooker, it might have seemed like a suicidal jump, but a tightly whirling wind caught him, preventing his fall.

Yuder stepped on the wind beneath his feet and soared high. With each subsequent leap, his altitude visibly increased, quickly reaching a dizzying height.

Despite it being a not-so-cold day in the southern region, the wind was unusually fierce. This made it almost effortless for him to step on the wind and ascend swiftly.

As his soaring body reached its limit and seemed to slow down for a brief moment, he glanced back. The golden hair of Kishiar, following him

rapidly, flashed into view.

Yuder stepped on the wind again and leaped forward. In the terrifying spectacle, fit to make anyone with acrophobia faint, no one noticed his quiet crossing through the air.

Effortlessly handling his power and instinctively finding the optimal route, he soon reached his intended destination. Skimming along the southern-style red-painted temple roof, the bell tower soon emerged from the darkness.

Yuder, who landed in front of the bell, which was only quiet because the bell ringer had left his post, turned his head while catching his breath. And at that exact moment, his eyes met with Kishiar, who was stepping into the bell tower. His red eyes sparkled with a smile.

“I expected as much, but you are indeed swift. How do you so effortlessly evade obstacles without making a sound?”

After landing and lightly brushing his long robe, he didn’t look tired at all, as if he had been here before Yuder.

“So, does this prove that I’m a useful ‘pouch’ now?”

“…”

Yuder marveled anew at how Kishiar, who didn’t train daily in handling the power of the Awakener like the Cavalry members, had progressed so far. It was as if he was born with incredible talent.

In terms of finely manipulating and controlling power, not even Ever Beck, who was always the best among the Cavalry members, could match this level. Kishiar’s development, which seemed to leap not just one but ten steps at a time, was unbelievable unless witnessed firsthand.

“…I see. It seems I worried needlessly. From now on, I’ll speed up without concern.”

“Of course. As much as you like.”

Yuder gazed down at the landscape beneath the bell tower, taking a breath. The city, sparkling with lanterns under the high, cold night sky, was beautiful enough to prevent memories of the ruins from his past life from resurfacing.

Fitting for a hub of maritime trade, the end of Charloin was all sea. In the night, the horizon roiled black, with ships of various sizes moored side by side.

While Yuder observed the ships, Kishiar approached from behind, standing in the same direction to observe at the same level. Unexpectedly, he spread his coat and enveloped Yuder's body in it. The long, thick coat instantly covered them both, spreading warmth and tickling Yuder's nose with Kishiar's distinctive scent.

As Yuder blinked and looked up, a nonchalant voice came from above.

"You're intently observing the port. Is there a reason?"

"…Charloin has low terrain. If it rains heavily or a typhoon hits, the waves can get too high and cause a lot of damage."

"Right. The reason this place has thrived so far is largely due to its warm southern location, which doesn't receive much rain."

Yuder continued, looking down at the arms wrapped around him.

"Appearance of monsters and strange cracks can be dealt with, but if they combine with natural disasters like in the previous game, that port will no longer be Charloin's treasure but a nightmare."

"A major earthquake, you mean."

"Yes. Earthquakes occur not just on land but also at sea. And those at sea… are far more ferocious and terrifying than those on land."

Yuder remembered the southern regions ravaged by a major earthquake. In the face of such insurmountable natural disasters, millennia of human civilization crumbled easily, like a mere sandcastle.

The city was destroyed, and corpses piled up in the cracked earth. However, the most horrifying were regions like Charloin, with low terrain, where massive waves from the earthquake's effects swept over.

Cities completely submerged were barely recognizable, virtually erased without a trace. Most lives were washed away, making it difficult to ascertain what happened.

The few survivors trembled as they recounted the moment the waves overflowed and engulfed the city. The negligence of lords and nobles, who failed to take precautions despite knowing such events could happen, resulted in so many deaths that assigning blame or responsibility became meaningless.

After the chaos was quelled, several regions, much like the vicinity of the Great Sarain Forest, became completely desolate, turning into areas where no one would ever live again. In such places, as if by some unspoken agreement, monsters teemed, further complicating the already difficult lives of the people.

The influence of the Herne Duchy, based in the south, also waned considerably. The then-heir to the Herne Duchy, already scorned as a country bumpkin, became even less visible in the capital.

However, this time, the situation would not repeat itself.

During the previous life, when the Great Southern Earthquake occurred, Yudrain Aile was at the height of his glory, commanding thousands of members. Now, with only a handful of helpers, the situation might seem overwhelming in comparison.

But unlike the past, where Yudrain could neither go to the site nor prepare for the earthquake, Yuder now had the advantage of assessing the terrain and situation in advance, backed by a presence that shared warmth with him.

This alone gave Yuder the confidence to stand resolutely before the dark, undulating sea.

‘I must make it different this time. That’s why I came.’

“It’s definitely hard to imagine that a city could be buried by waves caused by an earthquake, but it’s a terrible thing to hear. If you were to prepare, what would you prioritize?”

Yuder voiced a strategy he had long contemplated but never spoken aloud, feeling somewhat unfamiliar with the words as they left his mouth.

“First, we should build walls to block the waves and widely disseminate evacuation plans. We must also ensure the safety of ships, which could be in grave danger if they capsize or are swept away, by docking them in different ports. The cooperation of those Awakeners who can control earth and water, along with administrative support, will be more crucial than ever. We’ll handle the former, while the latter will require assistance from First Princess Myra and the officials.”

“Earth, water, and administration,” Kisiar remarked with a gentle smile, as if he understood Yuder’s thoughts from those words alone.

“It would be best if nothing happens, but if it does repeat, this time it will go as planned. I’ll help ensure that.”

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Chapter 771

“It would be best if nothing happens, but if it does repeat, this time it will go as planned. I’ll help ensure that.”

His words felt like unfounded confidence, yet they were overwhelmingly positive and warm.

Since nothing had yet happened, it was uncertain whether his words would come true or not.

However, Yuder had no doubt that Kishiar La Orr would keep his word. Even if his words seemed light and absurd, Yuder knew the sincerity behind them wasn’t light at all.

This deep assurance came from knowing that someone was there to trust and rely on, even if something happened to Yuder himself. It was fortunate that this person, who believed in Yuder’s words and memories without condition, had the capability and will to achieve goals on his behalf.

Thus, Yuder felt a bit pathetic for still holding back things he couldn’t easily tell this man, who so firmly believed and supported him.

Yuder then left Kishiar’s embrace, gauged the direction to head next, and used his power. As he leaped upon the winds, he immediately felt a presence following him.

Yuder crossed a distance of dozens of houses in an instant, much faster than before. He leaped over Charloin’s night guards, who were diligently guarding the gate without noticing someone flying overhead, and passed the wall dividing the city from the outside without trouble.

As he flew across the desolate plains, unseen in the lantern light, relying on the moonlight and stars, Yuder felt the faint breath of the man following him. It was a presence so slight that it was imperceptible unless focused on, but for Yuder, that was enough.

Soon, a new town appeared, smaller in scale and more like a countryside settlement than Charloin, yet with a considerable population.

Yuder paused his movement atop the highest tree in the area, watching Kishiar stop following him. Kishiar's golden hair was slightly disheveled, yet he didn't seem too exhausted, almost sparking a sense of rivalry in Yuder.

"Is this Mclara?"

"Yes."

"It's not near the harbor. What should we know about this place?"

"This is where the poor, driven from Charloin, usually settle. The area is cramped with old and dangerous buildings and is more populated than it seems."

"So, even the appearance of a monster before the disaster could complicate things greatly."

"Yes. The biggest issue here is that only a few Imperial soldiers maintain order, so preparing for that is crucial. The local lord is somewhat greedy, but he's easy to talk to, so sending someone should quickly resolve things."

"Is this from the previous game?"

"Yes. But obviously, we're not acquainted now. Back then, the Southern branch of the Cavalry was here."

"I see."

Yuder didn't explain why the branch couldn't move to Charloin at the time. Kishiar would probably guess the reason.

"If he's the type to accept bribes to allow a Cavalry branch without objection, he shouldn't be too difficult to handle."

See? Without saying anything, he already understands everything.

Yuder nodded and pointed towards the lord’s mansion, not far from there.

“Yes, the place where the lord resides is over there. Next to it is where the Imperial Army stays, and frankly, there are no other decent facilities beyond these two.”

“I understand.”

Yuder then lifted off towards the next place to inspect. As he headed towards the next area, the distant sea gradually faded from view, and the grass and trees started to become sparse. It meant they were nearing the desert.

“I never thought I’d personally assess the desert terrain of the south. Quite fascinating.”

The man who had been following behind quickened his pace and moved alongside Yuder, whispering.

“Have you never seen it before?”

“No. The villa where I stayed in my childhood was near the sea, and no one was brave enough to show a troublesome child the dangerous desert. I asked a few times and then tried to escape on my own, but my mother had foreseen this and had people ready to stop me. It’s a rather regrettable memory.”

Kishiar, referring to his younger self as a troublesome child, smiled.

‘Considering the reactions of the servants I met when I visited the palace where he stayed during his princely days, and the fact that he wasn’t taken to the desert despite his requests, he must have been quite a handful.’

Even now, Kishiar often behaved in unexpectedly bizarre ways.

The foresight of the former Empress, who had anticipated and prevented Kishiar’s escape attempt, also seemed remarkable.

‘But Kishiar isn’t one to give up on his intentions after just one failure. Perhaps things were different in his childhood.’

“Didn’t you try to escape again after that failure?”

“Hmm… If I tried to escape again, the kind and gentle child who helped me would have been in big trouble. So, I gave up. I couldn’t hurt others just for my own amusement, right?”

The young child who had helped the young prince in the southern villa.

Although the term was unfamiliar, the story seemed somewhat familiar. A face suddenly flashed through Yuder’s mind. After a moment of silence, he asked.

“By any chance, is that child… someone I know?”

“Of course. He grew up to be my excellent adjutant.”

“…”

It was indeed Nathan Zuckerman.

The disparity between the image of the large, stern knight and the kind, gentle child was significant, but Yuder chose not to comment. He was thankful he had seen the mage Hellem treat Nathan Zuckerman with affection, like a small child, beforehand.

As Yuder remained silent, Kishiar chuckled softly and changed the subject.

“The south is still known for its abundance of ancient mysteries. It’s said because of the many ruins, but the landforms contribute to that reputation as well. Here, the sea is close, yet one can see a vast desert. It’s neither low on water nor does it rain much. The coexistence of such opposites, both dry and wet, is surely a mystery, isn’t it?”

“Now that you mention it… Yes, it is.”

It was so common that Yuder hadn’t thought of it as strange, but the south indeed had both the sea and the desert.

“People in the south believe that this is a remnant of the great catastrophe that struck a thousand years ago.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“It’s too obvious to us. But if you ask someone from the south, you’ll get a different perspective. It seems there are quite a few legends around here.”

Yuder, using his power to fly, gazed at the distant, faintly visible horizon. As it was the direction of the desert, there was nothing to obscure the horizon - no mountains, trees, or buildings.

‘The place where things that shouldn’t coexist, coexist…’

The more he thought about it, the more this phrase circled in his mind. In the midst of a nagging feeling that he was on the verge of a revelation, Yuder, just as he entered the third area, suddenly remembered someone’s voice and unwittingly spoke out.

“Ah…”

“What’s the matter?”

“Because of what you just said, I think I understand why Aton and the Southern merchants chose the south as the place to commit their deeds.”

“You think you know why they chose the south?”

Overwhelmed by his realization, Yuder stopped in a place where he wouldn’t be noticed and faced Kishiar.

“Aton once told me that this land contains all the conditions for becoming immeasurably imbalanced. What they did was merely add to the effects of an imbalance that would have occurred eventually. They said that all conditions were complete on that day. Do you remember?”

“He did say that.”

“Where else is there a land as imbalanced as this, where desert and sea coexist? If a land already imbalanced is prone to cracks, monsters, and even disasters, then what they did was really just…”

Before Yuder could finish, the man who always seemed to understand him better than anyone, his eyes widened in realization.

“So, It’s not that they brought about a disaster and cracks from scratch with human power, but they used magic, life, or something to stir up an already existing ‘imbalance’. It might seem similar, but there’s a significant difference. That’s what you’re getting at, right?”

“Yes.”

Until now, Yuder had thought that Aton and the Southerners merely fulfilled some conditions like offering sacrifices in a magic circle to summon cracks and monsters.

But this explanation didn’t fully clarify why they specifically chose the South. However, if one considers that a disaster might have occurred here eventually and the Southerners merely ignited it, the story changes.

“It’s easier to go from 5 to 10 than from 0 to 10, if you already know where the 5 is.”

“That’s right. If Aton and his backers knew that ‘the aftermath of an imbalance that could have occurred someday’ would come in such a way, then that means…”

“In the previous game, all the places where similar problems occurred were already known to them, and there existed the possibility that they could commit the same acts at any time, as long as they could shake the imbalance.”

That was exactly what Yuder wanted to say.

“…If that’s true, then the events of the previous game could happen much faster and more frequently this time, depending on the situation.”

Yuder clenched his teeth tightly.

After quickly covering the remaining areas, they returned to Charloin. During their return, the dark night had lightened, and the sun began to rise in the east.

When they finally leaped over the gates of Charloin and landed on the roof of the Southern branch of the Cavalry, the sun was fully risen.

“It took us about half a day exactly.”

Kishiar whispered.

“Are you tired?”

“I’m fine. What about you, Commander…?”

“I’m perfectly fine too.”

Yuder had expected Kishiar to suggest going in to rest or to have a meal, but Kishiar remained unusually silent. He just looked at Yuder for a long while.

“…Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Just now, our conversation sparked a certain thought.”

A faint smile appeared on Kishiar’s lips.

“Old people believed nightmares were like the touch of mist flowing from where the Black Moon, chased away by the Sun God, hides. Similar to monsters.”

“…”

“It just occurred to me that the day you had a bad dream was also the day when ‘the aftermath of the imbalance’ caused a crack to open and monsters to appear. It might be an overthought, but still.”

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Chapter 772

“It just occurred to me that the day you had a bad dream was also the day when ‘the aftermath of the imbalance’ caused a crack to open and monsters to appear. It might be an overthought, but still.”

As if a massive stone had been cast into an already stormy lake, a second wave of shock surged through Yuder’s heart.

Kishiar’s words held truth. The day of his nightmare coincided with the appearance of a strange crack above the Cavalry’s southern branch. But could there truly be a link between these events?

It sounded absurd. However, even Kishiar, acknowledging it as ‘overthought,’ couldn’t resist voicing the thought, suggesting multiple implications.

If he had truly believed the possibility to be zero, he would not have spoken at all.

Struggling to comprehend, Yuder looked into Kishiar’s eyes and hesitantly spoke, “When you say the nightmare was the… touch of the Black Moon, what exactly do you mean by that?”

“In the early days, when I had just settled in Peletta, I often had disturbing dreams. The elders there said such nightmares were like the misty touch flowing from where the Black Moon hides, inescapable but eventually disappearing with the sunrise. It was their way of offering solace.”

This bore a striking resemblance to the scriptural tales of monsters born from the blood of the Black Moon.

The power of the Black Moon, once pervasive, had retreated, eclipsed by those who manifested the Sun God’s power. Yet, its cursed blood remained, infiltrating the world through cracks, manifesting as monsters.

Everyone, including Yuder, had always believed this to be true.

Seeing Yuder's furrowed brow, Kishiar broke the silence, "Shall we delve deeper? If monsters are born from the cursed blood of the Black Moon, where does this Black Moon reside?"

"Perhaps beyond this world… if it indeed exists."

"Exactly. The Black Moon's power has withdrawn into eternal darkness. The continuous emergence of monsters through cracks could be evidence, as the First Duke Tain speculated, of something beyond our world. Remember what we found in the torn pages we found in the ancient tomb a while ago? He used quite unique descriptions."

"I'm not certain about the specifics."

Yuder remembered the summary Kishiar had provided from those torn papers but couldn't recall every exact phrase.

Nodding, Kishiar began reciting without hesitation, "*Some 'cursed beings' had the ears of a rabbit, the wings of a bird, the tail of a dog, and the claws of a mole. Others bore the eyes of a cat and the scales of a fish. 'The Word of God' speaks of these mixed beings as coming from the world of the Black Moon*… This part, specifically."

Emphasizing 'The Word of God,' Kishiar's voice resonated with Yuder, who then remembered the moment. A vast catacomb hidden among ancient burial grounds, filled with the stench of age-old dust and littered with monster corpses.

"The Word of God is indeed the scriptures. But the standard scriptures we read don't explicitly mention the 'world of the Black Moon.' I've verified this since arriving in the South."

"But isn't the meaning itself almost similar to what we know?"

"Yes, It could have been merely a summarized expression, but what if it's not?"

Silence followed, ponderous and deep.

“People think deeply about the scriptures being almost the only records from ancient times before the Great Destruction. However, few know that the current scriptures have undergone about three revisions over time. The priests did this mainly to soften the cruel content and simplify complex words and meanings for everyone’s understanding.”

Kishiar noted that only the Grand Temple held the original, unedited scriptures and they were not immediately accessible. But his intent was clear.

“So, the term ‘world of the Black Moon’ might have been altered and lost through this process to the meaning we know today?”

“That’s right. The meaning is indeed similar to what we know. Yet, when you think about it, it could also be completely different. Like you answered earlier, guessing that the Black Moon is vaguely somewhere outside our world is one thing, but referring to that outside world as the Black Moon’s realm is quite another.”

With that, Kishiar steered the conversation to the main point.

“Let’s reconsider, changing the words we use. The ancients thought that nightmares flowed from the world where the Black Moon hid. Just as monsters flow from the blood that falls through the cracks, they thought the same of nightmares. In fact, they seemed to think that all sorts of bad things come along with monsters in this way.”

Yuder slowly nodded in response to Kishiar’s query about the common superstition that touching freshly spawned monsters could transfer misfortune or madness.

Just as some viewed the byproducts of hunted monsters as symbols of fortune, many believed that newly appeared monsters brought all kinds of ill-fated curses.

“But now we’ve learned that these cracks could originate from what the Southerners call ‘imbalanced lands,’ and even human intentions might lure monsters. If a significant nightmare suddenly visited you in such a situation, it’s not too far-fetched to think there might be a connection between the two, right?”

Kishiar didn’t know the specifics of Yuder’s dream.

The earlier mention of a mist-like touch had eerily reminded Yuder of the white gloves and their tactile sensation in his dream, yet it seemed unrelated to the dream itself. Nevertheless, the expressions Kishiar used felt like they were piercing the core of Yuder’s nightmare.

Breathing deeply, Yuder conceded, “That could be possible.”

“Of course, you’ve only had such a bad dream once. To confirm the speculation of a link between nightmares and strange cracks, similar occurrences would need to happen more often. I hope they don’t, so let’s consider my words as mere premature speculation.”

Kishiar’s sincerity was palpable in his hope. Unsure of what to say, Yuder remained silent, lips pressed firmly together. Observing this, a slightly bitter smile crossed Kishiar’s face.

“But seeing your expression, it seems I’ve troubled your mind. Don’t worry about remembering this conversation if it bothers you. Forget it. My overconcern might have led me to speak needlessly.”

Upon hearing the words ‘overconcern,’ Yuder made up his mind.

Even if it seemed rational to speak about the dream only after uncovering something, by then Kishiar would have already suppressed his worries countless times. Despite seeing numerous times that Kishiar’s outward indifference was not genuine, was he really going to rely again on his patience?

Of course, Kishiar would endure, no matter the pain. That was his forte.

Yet, that wasn’t the right answer.

It made no sense for Yuder to be the one to repeatedly tell him not to hold back, only to force him into silence yet again. He didn’t want to do that.

Yuder forced his unmoving lips to part, as if prying them open.

“No. Commander, you haven’t worried excessively. You said what needed to be said. Please don’t talk like that.”

His voice, uncharacteristically strained, emerged with difficulty, carrying a faint tremble. Kishiar remained silent.

“…”

“The reason I couldn’t speak about the dream was because in that night’s vision, I saw the former Commander… or rather, his hand.”

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Chapter 773

“The reason I couldn’t speak about the dream was because in that night’s vision, I saw the former Commander… or rather, his hand.”

The subject was the same person, yet simultaneously, it was not the same person.

Hence, Yuder’s reference wavered momentarily, unable to find a clear foothold. He faintly realized the strangeness of it all, yet he had no choice. How could one precisely refer to someone who was the same yet not the same?

Before Kishiar’s silent presence, Yuder realized that he must have already guessed the answer to the unspoken confession.

“…As expected, you had already anticipated this.”

“That morning, as soon as you woke up and saw me while still half-asleep, you retreated away from me. Afterwards, you asked whether I felt anything while sleeping or had any strange dreams.”

His calm voice flowed as if he had been prepared to give this answer from the start.

“So, naturally, I had to think the dream’s content was related to me. I’m still uncertain why you specifically mentioned the hand, though.”

Unintentionally, Yuder’s gaze drifted towards Kishiar’s hand, which was now bare, devoid even of the magic tool ring he usually wore. The hand he had grown so familiar with over time seemed strangely unfamiliar at this moment of dream confession.

The smooth back of his hand.

The protruding bones and blue tendons.

The fingertips imbued with the hue of ripe fruit and the almond-shaped nails.

All these were features Yuder had never seen in his previous life.

In his previous life, Kishiar had worn white gloves until his death, probably hiding the same gruesome scars that Yuder now concealed. What would that hand, bearing scars like those left by the Red Stone, have looked like?

It was now an impossible question to answer, too difficult even to imagine.

Yuder inhaled sharply and began to speak.

“It was exactly as I said. In the dream, only a hand appeared.”

“Just a hand without the body?”

“Yes.”

“Truly a nightmare, then. But that means the hand could have belonged to someone else, right?”

Instead of answering, Yuder looked at the man’s face. His own gloomy reflection in those red eyes appeared like a corpse just emerged from a coffin, the face of a long-dead convict.

Yuder stared at that face and slowly, very slowly, began to speak. His voice, devoid of emotion, came out dry and brittle.

“That person always wore similar gloves. White leather gloves, almost identical in material to the ones I wear. And in the dream, the hand was wearing that glove.”

The cold leather gloves, a sensation Yuder could never forget, always pressing down on his neck or shoulders. Despite his efforts to forget and his belief that he had, the touch was instantly recognizable, even in dreams.

Yuder continued, recalling the cool touch that had caressed him in the dream.

“Even if nothing else had appeared in the dream… I would have known whose hand it was.”

Indeed, if the dream had shown someone else’s hand, it wouldn’t have felt like such a profound nightmare. It wouldn’t have mattered whether they were the hands of those he had killed or the hands of Emperor Katchian. Even if those hands had appeared wielding a sword, he was certain he wouldn’t have been frightened

.But it was unmistakably Kishiar’s hand.

It was a hand that, no matter how much Yuder wished to mistake it for another, he simply could not.

The man, who had been scrutinizing Yuder’s face, asked in a slightly lowered voice, yet with a hint of gentleness, “Did the hand merely exist there? Or was there contact?”

“It initiated contact,” Yuder revealed, describing the encounter with the hand clad in white glove in the dream. He chose his words with extreme care, worried that the part about the hand caressing his face might sound peculiar.

But no matter how he explained it, the fact remained that the skin was touched. Therefore, it seemed best to hope that Kishiar, the listener, would perceive his words as objectively and devoid of emotion as possible.

“And then I…”

Articulating what followed was the most challenging part of all. After a long silence, Yuder finally mustered the courage to speak of the dream’s enigmatic conclusion.

“…The moment I recognized whose hand it was, it responded to me.”

“A response from just a hand?”

“It wrote the word ‘correct’ on my skin with its fingers. Then it grabbed my neck and pushed me down into the darkness… and when I opened my eyes,

it was morning. That was the end.”

After speaking, the dream seemed trivial. It was unbelievable that such a seemingly insignificant tale had taken so long to tell.

Yuder stood silently, waiting for Kishiar’s response.

The rising sun behind the man cast a long shadow over Yuder, enveloping him in darkness. The backlighting hid Kishiar’s expression from view.

A moment later, the man slowly raised his hand. Initially, it seemed as if he was examining his own hand, but that wasn’t the case. He extended his hand forward and brushed Yuder’s forehead. The fingertips, bearing a cool dampness, revealed the sweat on Yuder’s forehead.

Only then did Yuder realize that his forehead was sweaty.

“A truly perplexing dream. Thank you for sharing it,” Kishiar said, his lips moving in the dense backlight, his steady voice the only clear indication of his presence.

“But as of now, I have no significant guesses regarding that dream. Regrettably, it’s beyond my understanding.”

“…”

“May I ask you something, though?”

As Yuder nodded slowly, Kishiar, showing rare hesitation, cautiously inquired, “Did you feel, in the dream, that the hand intended to harm you?”

Did that hand intend to harm him?

Yuder reflected.

From the moment he felt the touch until he awoke, his skin had crawled continuously. It was a touch so surreal that it bordered on fear. But to say that the hand felt malicious or vengeful? That wasn’t the case.

The hand neither clenched into a fist to strike Yuder, nor did it strangle him.

It simply caressed slowly, wrote a word with its finger, and then pushed him away.

Yuder felt a deep aversion but no distinct murderous intent. Even a hand without a mouth could convey that much.

After much contemplation, Yuder shook his head in conclusion.

“No. I don’t think it was… intending harm. Perhaps.”

“Is that so.”

Was Kishiar’s voice quivering slightly, or was it Yuder’s imagination? Before Yuder could respond, Kishiar had already moved on to his next thought, leaving no opportunity to further discern his reaction.

“Just because we know nothing now does not mean we will remain ignorant forever. I will continue to seek out relevant information. By the time of Aton’s next investigation, I will have much to share.”

Yuder, with his head bowed, gazing at the ground, asked,

“Do you not think that I am merely overreacting to a nonsensical dream?”

“It’s natural for anyone to react strongly to an ominous dream. Had I been in your place, my reaction might have been even more intense. Have you already forgotten how I recently spent sleepless nights borrowing all sorts of forbidden books? If anything, that’s what should be called an overreaction. Though personally, I don’t think of it as such.”

Kishiar lightly laughed, turning his recent actions into a joke.

“Even if it’s hard to explain, there’s certainly something troubling you, hence your deep contemplation so far. It might seem difficult to articulate now, but once understood, it might return as a simple answer like the strange cracks or disasters you believed to be supernatural phenomena.”

“…”

“If it turns out to be merely a simple dream, then that would be the best outcome.”

Yuder lifted his head to look at Kishiar again. In the meantime, the sun had risen higher, diminishing the backlight, and Kishiar’s expression became visible once more. Yuder had expected him to be smiling gently as usual, but he was not.

He looked sad.

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Chapter 774

“My lord, you have returned.”

In the hallway of the Southern branch of the Cavalry, under the high midday sun, Kishiar strode with a neat face betraying no hint of his overnight excursion outside. He nodded only towards Nathan Zuckerman, who approached to greet him.

“Yes, Nathan. Any changes in the meantime?”

“Since this morning, we have nearly completed the crackdown on the illegal fighting rings in Charloin. Of these, five establishments that were forcibly suppressing Awakeners were apprehended by the Charloin Security Force. All confiscated drugs were low-grade Calanesa, seemingly distributed by Southern merchants.”

“Well done. And the reaction of the citizens?”

“Extremely positive. Calanesa was just beginning to spread through illegal rings, so halting that has been particularly well received. Thanks to the positive perception gained from the recent monster elimination, more people are actively assisting our enforcement efforts.”

“It may be challenging to uproot the fighting ring culture entirely, but this is a good target for the Southern branch’s future achievements.”

As they conversed naturally while walking, many who passed by recognized Kishiar, bowing their heads in greeting. Yet, they could hardly catch the content of the conversation between the two.

This was to be expected. Among those who had reached the pinnacle of swordsmanship, mere lip movements without sound sufficed for communication. Kishiar often used this method to converse discreetly when outside.

Kishiar listened to Nathan Zuckerman’s report with a quiet smile. Most of it was good news.

The public perception of the Cavalry had greatly improved, with Southern nobles who once ignored them now cautious. Particularly impactful was the public support from Myra El Herne of the prestigious Herne family, considered a spiritual pillar of the South. She had declared the Cavalry instrumental in capturing the murderer and accomplices of the Second Prince Ashrav.

Who was Myra? A precious child of the Herne family, born as a female for the first time after decades, beloved by many in the South. If she deemed the Cavalry trustworthy, people began to drop their prejudices.

The incident where Lord Jacob of Charloin failed to protect the young nobles, who had been VIPs at the Nukijo illegal fighting ring, further fueled the shift in opinion. Rumors even circulated that Duke Peletta’s divine sword, radiating a divine aura, had nearly punished the Lord for his lies, causing him to flee in terror.

Consequently, doubts about Kishiar being a swordmaster ceased.

The rapid change in public opinion led the families of those young nobles to accept a humiliating sentence of three years of servitude and a hefty fine, a stark contrast to their previous arrogance.

Similarly, Duke Peletta and his assistant’s interactions with officials, mages, and merchants whom they previously met on their first day in the South, had been fruitful.

The Cavalry had clearly demonstrated their intention not to blindly antagonize the existing powers in the South by that single act of cooperation. Those who had suspected the Emperor of using the Cavalry to purge them all were now reassured.

It was only a few days after the Cavalry had begun their work in earnest that the fighting arenas, which had been untouchable, started to disappear. Although monsters had appeared, no one was harmed, and the members of

the Cavalry spent the whole day wandering around Charloin, assisting those in need and enforcing law and order.

During one of these patrols, this dawn, the fishmongers from a nearby fishing village recognized Kurga Sing, the son of a fisherman from a neighboring village, in Charloin.

They embraced Kurga warmly, welcoming him back like a son returning home in triumph, loudly proclaiming their recognition in their strong southern accent for all to hear. Kurga, embarrassed yet pleased, promised to treat them all to drinks.

Upon receiving this report from Nathan Zuckerman, Kishiar slowly nodded and spoke.

“It’s a bit later than expected, but the timing couldn’t have been better.”

One of the conditions he had set for applicants when forming the Cavalry branch was that they had to be from the region.

The people of the Orr Empire, long resistant to change, had a strong sense of pride in their origins, especially those from the south, who were particularly averse to accepting help from outsiders, even in dire situations.

To them, merely revealing that the Cavalry members were not foreigners, but actually from the same region, greatly facilitated their activities. And such revelations were best spread naturally, rather than announced outright.

This event would likely lead to the delayed realization that most of the southern branch members of the Cavalry were locals.

‘…This would then change the fundamental perception of those who had been treating the Cavalry as outsiders with suspicion and wariness.’

The tales of ordinary southern youths becoming Cavalry members, honored by the Emperor and returning home with titles of respect, would become endless sources of marvelous stories in taverns, streets, and alleys, big and small.

This meant a significant shift in perception for those who, until now, had felt the Cavalry to be an elusive and challenging entity, aiding them in viewing Awakeners more positively.

Becoming an Awakener meant one could join the Cavalry.

Joining the Cavalry meant the possibility of social ascension and success.

Even those who were not Awakeners could potentially become one, showing that they were not much different from us.

This simple formula could bring about how much change in those who had been stuck in a stagnant social hierarchy, content with their realities. The nobles, ignorant of change, might not yet fully grasp or wish to acknowledge this reality, but Kishiar was different.

He was well aware, more than anyone, of the significant shifts in consciousness that had already taken place in the capital, where the Cavalry headquarters was located, and where it was easier to encounter Awakeners. Now, it was time to spread this change nationwide through the establishment of branches.

Lost in thought, Kishiar suddenly noticed something outside the window that captured his attention. Yuder Aile was walking briskly outside the branch. This was the first time he had seen him since they parted ways this morning.

Despite it being just a few hours ago, Kishiar couldn’t take his eyes off his black hair. As his Lord stopped, Nathan Zuckerman naturally stopped as well.

The adjutant, attuned to his Lord’s wishes, did not question Kishiar’s silent gaze out the window. He knew exactly who Kishiar was watching.

Whenever Kishiar behaved out of the ordinary, it invariably involved Yuder Aile. It was unclear how he managed to do it, but Kishiar possessed an uncanny ability to spot his beloved and cherished assistant, Yuder, no matter how far away, as if he had a sixth sense for it.

Moments after Yuder had completely vanished from view, Kishiar finally spoke.

“Nathan. Contact the Lord of Mclara and arrange a meeting. However, let the purpose be officially about Duke Peletta’s ‘investment’ in Mclara.”

“Is that the area you inspected yesterday?”

“Yes, it was one of them.”

Kishiar then mentioned the names of other areas he and Yuder had toured, issuing several commands. The purpose was to closely monitor the trends in those areas and ensure they could secure a route for movement at any time. These were also steps that Yuder had mentioned the night before as the first phase of disaster response.

Considering the current situation, these actions might seem unnecessary and somewhat puzzling, but Nathan Zuckerman bowed his head without opposing his Lord’s wishes.

“I understand. I shall follow your orders.”

Expecting Kishiar to dismiss him, Nathan was surprised when Kishiar remained silent even after receiving his response. Quietly, Nathan continued to follow the silent figure walking down the corridor.

After a while, when they reached a corridor utterly devoid of anyone else’s presence, Kishiar spoke up.

“Nathan.”

“Yes, my Lord.”

“What do you think happens to the dead?”

Even Nathan Zuckerman, who had been conditioned by countless peculiar questions from his Lord, found it unusually challenging to answer this one.

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Chapter 775

“What do you think happens to the dead?”

Even Nathan Zuckerman, who had been conditioned by countless peculiar questions from his Lord, found it unusually challenging to answer this one.

Where do the dead go? What could the meaning behind such a question be? The knight from the soYudern lands, having been silent, finally spoke with a heavy voice, “In the temples, they say one goes to heaven or hell, don’t they?”

According to the doctrine of the Sun God, it is believed that after death, based on divine judgment, one either goes to heaven, where angels dwell, or hell, the realm of demons. However, eternity is not spent there; once all deeds are accounted for, one is embraced by the Sun God, becoming eternally a part of the burning flame.

Kishiar would know this, yet for some unknown reason he asked.

“So, by mentioning the temple, you imply that this differs from your personal beliefs, Nathan?”

“As you know, I have little interest in tales of gods or the like. To me, death is the end. I care not for what follows.”

Nathan, born to desert warriors but raised in the empire north of the sands, always maintained a distance from such beliefs. To him, the people and the master before him were far more significant than any deity. He didn’t wish to waste the living moments for the sake of the afterlife.

His knowledge of such matters stemmed solely from following the master, an imperial family member, to numerous temples in his youth, nothing more, nothing less.

“Interesting. Do the people of the south hold a different view on this?”

“In the faith of the Southerners… I’ve heard that when one dies, they become a star in the sky. Beyond that, I’m not certain,” he replied, recalling tales told by his parents in childhood, unsure if they truly become stars.

“So, either embraced by the sun or becoming a star… What then, do you think of the existence of ghosts?”

This third question compelled Nathan to reveal his doubts to his master.

“It seems to me that these are questions better suited for priests, not for me. Is there a reason you ask?”

“Just that I’ve never deeply pondered the afterlife, but now it seems I might need to explore these matters. I was curious about others’ views, and you, being my subordinate, were the first I thought to ask.”

“…You’ve come to inquire about the afterlife?”

“Sharp hearing, yet you question me again.”

Despite knowing why Nathan had asked, the master seemed disinclined to explain. Nathan remained silent for a long time, his extensive experience usually preventing any disconcert. His prolonged silence indicated the profound seriousness he found in this question.

Unconcerned with his subordinate’s reaction, Kishiar urged for an answer, “So, your response?”

“…Having never seen a ghost with my own eyes, I do not believe in them. Any claim to the contrary would be a delusion or madness.”

Hearing this blunt response, Kishiar’s lips curled into a faint smile.

“I see. As expected. Very well, you may go.”

“…”

As Kishiar waved his hand dismissively and turned away, Nathan gazed at his retreating figure, deep in thought. He had a strong suspicion that his

master’s unusual behavior was somehow connected to the broader intrigues of Yuder Aile.

If the absurd question truly held significant importance for the master, Nathan, as his adjutant, felt compelled to gather any information he could to assist.

‘Regarding the afterlife,’ he mused, recalling days long past spent with his parents. A recent visit to the village of his youth had sharpened these memories.

Among these, he spoke of a recollection that suddenly flitted through his mind. “Now that I think about it, there was an elderly Southerner in our village who spoke about what happens after death. He said that not everyone becomes a complete star when they die; parts of life get filtered out like dregs, forming the darkness of the night.”

Kishiar, who had been walking, stopped and turned his head. Nathan Zuckerman noticed that his story had struck a chord with the master.

“Dregs that get filtered out…”

“It seems to be the Southern version of the idea that those who do wrong are barred from heaven.”

“No, it’s rather similar to something else.”

“Pardon?”

“Consider this: isn’t there a similar notion here too? That after fulfilling their deeds in heaven and hell, souls are embraced by the Sun God to burn eternally. However, there are deeds that, no matter how much time passes, cannot be erased. Whether good or bad, the unerased signifies remnants, dregs.”

Kishiar, deep in thought and stroking his chin, uttered in a somber tone, “… But our side doesn’t elaborate on what happens to these remnants. Only that

they cannot return to nothingness, only mentioning becoming part of the eternal flame of the Sun God.”

“I see.”

“Deeds that can’t return to nothing. Remnants buried in darkness…”

In the ensuing silence, Kishiar was lost in thought. His red eyes, visible beneath his lowered eyelashes, held a deeper contemplation than ever before. Nathan Zuckerman waited quietly for his master to gather his thoughts.

The response that came was once again unexpected.

“Even the remnants left after burning were once part of a whole. Then, is it meaningful to speculate and judge based on just those remnants?”

This seemed more of a rhetorical question than a direct inquiry to Nathan, as Kishiar’s gaze was fixated on the unknown void.

“If we must ponder… it wouldn’t hurt, I suppose.”

Kishiar looked up at Nathan Zuckerman.

“Is that so?”

“People say not to judge a person by a part of them, but that part does indeed speak about the person. That is my view.”

Kishiar nodded slightly, his gaze once again drifting out the window. There, unchanged, was Yuder Aile.

Dressed in a dark uniform, the pale man was surrounded by people from various groups, all fervently speaking to him. Despite the chaos, Yuder, with an unflustered, expressionless face, addressed and resolved each person’s concerns in turn.

At a glance, he seemed like someone who had been doing such work for decades, but in reality, he was only in his early twenties, in his first year

with the Cavalry. Yet, no one around him seemed to acknowledge this fact.

Anyone in his presence soon realizes that his words are mostly correct, even if the advice is unpleasant. They accept it as if it were from a superior. This was the peculiar aura that Yuder possessed, a strange influence that made others agree with him.

As Nathan observed the scene, Kishiar spoke up.

“Nathan, can you look into that part you mentioned earlier in more detail?”

“Do you mean the tale about the remnants that failed to become stars? If it’s needed, I shall do so.”

“Thank you. I realize it must have seemed like a strange question.”

Instead of replying, Nathan let out a small sigh, directing it towards the hand of his master patting his shoulder.

“It’s far easier than when you proposed creating a bestiary and map for the monsters around Peletta.”

That was his attempt at a joke, and Kishiar, recalling that time, smiled.

“That was necessary for everyone, but this is solely for me. So, it need not take precedence over other tasks. I entrust it to you, Nathan.”

“Yes.”

With a nod, Nathan Zuckerman left. Kishiar stood still, gazing down at his own hands.

‘I said it couldn’t be speculated with the knowledge I had, but in truth, emotions could lead to conjecture. Especially if it were a part of me.’

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Chapter 776

With a nod, Nathan Zuckerman left. Kishiar stood still, gazing down at his own hands.

‘I said it couldn’t be speculated with the knowledge I had, but in truth, emotions could lead to conjecture. Especially if it were a part of me.’

Yuder’s recent nightmare was significantly different from his previous dreams. It was neither a reenactment of scenarios from the ‘previous game’ nor shared with Kishiar.

The most notable difference was that, despite this, Kishiar La Orr from the previous game, or more precisely, his hand, made an appearance.

Yuder’s reaction alone was enough to confirm with certainty that this was a first-time occurrence, even if he had never dreamt something like this before.

Therefore, Yuder felt, and Kishiar also thought, that this dream was not an ordinary one. The mere appearance of the hand and the actions it took in the dream were all notably unusual.

Yuder mentioned that the hand had caressed him.

He tried to explain as calmly as possible, suppressing his emerging emotions, but the look in his eyes while speaking was far from usual. It was cold, detached, and empty, like someone who had reopened an old, deep scar.

Yet, within those eyes, there was a faint confusion, guilt, and a tiny spark of something he would probably never admit to having.

It was a spark all too familiar to Kishiar. He had seen Yuder nurture and grow it into a blazing flame more than anyone else.

Just the night before, under Kishiar’s touch, Yuder had fanned that flame countless times. The pure flames of passion that arose in his pitch-black eyes were so mesmerizing that they threatened to consume Kishiar in their intensity.

Knowing this, Kishiar could guess what Yuder might have recalled when he was touched in the dream.

Yuder didn’t explicitly talk about his past life relationship, but there are things in this world that can’t be described dryly, especially physical aspects.

Kishiar had deduced these things from the slight clues Yuder inadvertently dropped and the sequence in which the dream hand had touched Yuder. He had predicted much of this from Yuder’s words and behavior, as well as the fleeting moments of past lives he saw in his dreams, but it had never felt as vivid as now.

The reason was simple. For Yuder, those were just memories of a past long gone, but not this time.

“Cheek, lips, then the chin. Finally… the neck.”

Kishiar raised his hand, slowly moving it through the air as if tracing something.

It was the same path described by Yuder when he spoke of the dream hand’s caress.

Kishiar gazed at his hand, paused at the height of Yuder’s neck, and then closed his eyes.

He imagined an unfortunate man who had just regained his strength, future, and precious family, only to realize that he had lost everything again.

He wore gloves daily, much like the current Yuder, perhaps because the man from that time had endured similar or identical experiences. Yuder, who possessed only the power of the Awakener and was confident in his unique

skills, had faced the raw power of the Red Stone head-on and used it as an opportunity for self-improvement. But what about himself?

Kishiar easily imagined the worst-case scenario he would face if he were in such a situation, considering the condition of his body when he went on the mission to retrieve the Red Stone.

‘The balance of the body is completely broken by the rampage of the Awakener power. The worst scenario unfolds when one can no longer maintain the barely-held-together vessel.’

If such a situation were to arise, the outcome would be as clear as day. However, Kishiar focused on conjecturing what actions he himself would have taken.

‘If it were me.’

If it were him, he would have first sought a way to survive. The thought of losing the hope he had just grasped was unbearable and not something he could easily give up on. For that, he would have devoted all his time and resources. Even the ambitious Cavalry he had started and the enemies who had long awaited their turn would have been ignored in such a predicament.

But if, in the end, he found no solution and was certain that no new opportunities would come his way,

Then, perhaps,

‘He would have prepared for what comes after death.’

Dying without achieving his desired goals would have been regrettable, but in some ways, it might have been for the better. It’s a possibility one must always consider, something he had mentally prepared for since childhood.

Since the vessel began to crack, he had spent much time bedridden. Lying there, he read about numerous historical figures of power and idealists who dreamt of it, all falling and being stranded by unforeseeable tempests in life.

Had they succeeded, history might have drastically changed. Great figures who couldn’t even glimpse the threshold of their goals died in vain, and the ambitious, after enduring hardships to achieve everything, saw their accomplishments crumble to dust and disappear without a trace the moment they died. Such is life, and one’s ideals are no exception.

Emperor Keilusa once spoke similar words after losing the heir he cherished and damaging his vessel.

“Kishiar. I thought myself a man of considerable restraint, but today’s incomprehensible tragedy reveals how baselessly I believed that fate would ultimately smile upon me. To think that my only recourse is to curse the heavens, I do not even deserve to be a father to that child.”

Kishiar had harbored similar thoughts since his early years. His conclusion then was that until death, it’s not truly over, so he should enjoy life and live it to the fullest.

But could he have maintained such thoughts after being deprived of a second chance? Kishiar doubted it. Knowing the joy, success, fulfillment, and exhilaration brought by his current endeavors, he could hardly fathom the despair of them falling apart.

If he had never tasted hope, perhaps it would be different, but to vomit out the hope once savored seemed an unbearable task.

However, the death of Kishiar La Orr is not a solitary end. Before him stands an emperor on the brink of an uncertain death, an empress who pinned all her hopes on him, and loyal subjects, including a devoted assistant and knights united under the banner of Peletta.

For a peaceful death, he needed to consider those he would leave behind. In this process, there was no room for anything else to intervene.

So, ordinarily, that’s what would have happened.

In a situation where the end was foreseen, it seemed unlikely to afford attention to anything new, yet in the previous game, it appears such an event

had indeed occurred.

Kishiar remembered the eyes of the shabby, visibly ill man he had secretly observed from behind Yuder's dream. The man's gaze, watching the young and inexperienced Yuder, who appeared to be his real age, clumsily swinging a sword he had only recently acquired, had a hint of joy. He had attended the successor's inauguration ceremony, a place he needn't have bothered with, and hidden in the shadows, he watched as the successor donned the attire he had prepared and followed in his footsteps. Kishiar, with eyes devoid of any warmth, observed the man's foolish, feigned smile as he playfully pressed his lips to the back of his successor's hand.

Being himself, Kishiar was keenly aware of how absurd it all was.

Even appearing as nothing more than a hand and ultimately only managing to caress Yuder.

Yuder seemed unaware as he spoke, but Kishiar knew. The way the hand in the dream stroked him, the order, the method, except for the neck, were almost identical to how he usually tenderly touched Yuder when engulfed in affectionate feelings.

If the other person was devoid of emotion, merely a transient acquaintance from a troubled past, one would never touch him in such a manner.

These were feelings only Kishiar La Orr could perceive, and they bombarded his mind like a torrential downpour as he listened to the story.

An indescribable, instinctive certainty.

But how could he possibly convey this to Yuder?

Kishiar lowered his hand and opened his eyes. The fleeting look of pain had long since vanished.

He clenched his fist and nonchalantly left the place, moving on with his steps.

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Chapter 777

In a hidden village nestled between deserts seldom trodden, lay the southern base of the Star of Nagran-a sanctuary for the Awakeners who fled the pains of the outer world. Once a haven, it had transformed into a desolate shadow of its former self, its streets now eerily silent, devoid of human warmth.

Into this forsaken village, shrouded in tattered rags, stumbled a figure. Despite the cloak masking his visage, it was clear that this man could not properly use one of his arms and was limping. Ominously, following the sound of dragging, there was a strong smell of blood and pus.

Leaning wearily against his dulled blade, an Awakener grimaced, about to question the stranger, when the man unveiled his face. Half marred by grotesque burn scars, the other half strikingly handsome-a visage of stark contrast. Recognizing him, the Awakener cried out in shock, “Nahan!”

This was the man who left to seek the sage. But Nahan’s return was shadowed by change. His face, more haggard than before, eyes drowned in unspoken darkness. Despite being on friendly terms with Nahan, the Awakener, who had unwittingly turned pale, cautiously opened his mouth.

“What happened to you? What of the brethren who left with you?” he asked, trepidation lacing his voice.

“…”

“Don’t tell me… you didn’t meet the sage, did you?”

Staring blankly at the Awakener’s incredulous face, Nahan finally opened his mouth to answer.

“I met him.”

“You did? Then why return in such a state?” Confusion evident in his tone.

At those words, a twisted smile briefly crossed Nahan's lips. "The sage will not honor our agreement. Nor will I any longer."

"What do you mean the sage won't honor the agreement?" Their disbelief was palpable.

Ignoring the question, Nahan strode into the village. In the past, as soon as he entered, the villagers would all flock to him and create a commotion, now, only silence greeted him. Even the few people who could be seen did not approach Nahan immediately, but only sent a wary look from a distance.

Seeing this, Nahan, who was being followed by the Awakener, asked.

"What's happened here? Why is it so deserted? Where is Sera? No matter how much she dislikes me, she wouldn't empty the village without thinking."

"Ah, that's… sigh. You don't know how bad the atmosphere was here after you left…"

The Awakener began to speak with a resentful face, as if burdened by a long-kept secret. He recounted the escalating tensions between Nahan's followers and the sage's, the ensuing exodus of ordinary Awakeners, the southern merchants who had quietly infiltrated the southern outpost in the midst of this, and Sera's betrayal-joining hands with them under the guise of no contact from the sage.

Nahan learned that Sera, having received a request from the sage, had left for Charloin with her followers and had not returned since. A heavy silence fell upon Nahan as he absorbed this news.

"The atmosphere here is dire. Even the sick are left untreated. Remember Meto? The monster-taming child you brought from the east?"

Nahan's response was but a heavy silence, mirroring the weight of his thoughts.

“After the sage departed, his condition had been deteriorating continuously. Perhaps it was because Daemon had borrowed his powers… Sigh. It seems like we can’t question or speak to Daemon until he returns, but since he’s not here, there’s no way to know. I’m actually worried he might truly die.”

Though Nahan tried to lighten the mood by bringing up this topic, it only made the atmosphere colder. In a silence so deep it seemed to lower the temperature, the Awakener shivered involuntarily. Suddenly, Nahan clenched his teeth and pressed a hand to his own forehead, a groan of pain escaping from his staggering body.

“Ugh…”

“Nahan?!”

“Don’t touch me…”

Nahan, avoiding the Awakener’s attempt to support him, wrapped his head in his hands and groaned for a long time. It was a terrible sound, like the growling of a bound beast.

After stumbling around and rolling on the ground in agony, he finally managed to stand properly on his own. Panting, he returned to his previous state, and the Awakener realized that this wasn’t the first time Nahan had experienced this.

“Your arm doesn’t look good either. Are you… really okay? If it’s a disease or something…”

Startled by the sight of Nahan’s bloodshot eyes, the Awakener gasped in shock. Even being on the same side, Nahan’s fearsome appearance made him unapproachable.

Had something happened to make him this way? He never used to be like this.

Despite the Awakener’s obvious fear, Nahan’s expression remained unchanged. He spoke in a low, hoarse voice, “I’ve had headaches before,

but they started getting worse after I met the sage this time.”

“Really?”

“It’s not bad, though. Every time this pain ends, my mind clears, and I continue to realize something.”

The Awakener couldn’t comprehend what he meant and simply cocked his head, but Nahan didn’t elaborate. Instead, he gave an order.

“Gather all the brothers and sisters in this village who share our purpose.”

“I can gather them, but there are hardly any… What are you going to do?”

“We must do what we originally intended.”

This statement was significant. The Awakener, who had always agreed with Nahan’s ideology, was pleased that Nahan remained steadfast even in this state, but also worried.

The old Nahan was never this precarious. He used to joke around, and his innate coldness felt charming as a leader. Most importantly, back then, the gentle and kind Hosanna was always by his side.

Hosanna was not only helpful but also kind to everyone, not just Nahan. There were many missing colleagues at the time, and although they didn’t say it, it was shocking for everyone when he was caught by the Cavalry in the west and killed.

The Awakener realized anew how difficult it was to approach Nahan without Hosanna.

“You met the sage and just came back. Is that okay? When are the others coming? We don’t have enough people here.”

“The brothers and sisters who went with me might not be able to return. Something unexpected happened while meeting the sage.”

Muttering the sage’s name, Nahan’s gaze suddenly turned icy cold.

“An unexpected event?”

“While coming here, I made sure to contact the brethren at the central base, so they should be arriving soon. And…”

He opened his mouth slowly, ensuring that each word was clear for the awaiting Awakener to hear.

“Make sure everyone gets the message. The name, ‘The Star of Nagran,’ has appeared on the list of collaborators with the Cavalry.”

“What?”

“It wasn’t my doing. So, who could it be?”

The Awakener’s expression momentarily became blank. It was due to the collision between the logical conclusion and the long-ingrained brainwashing. As the words passed through his ears, they brought a sensation sharp as thorns, provoking a sudden, intense headache.

“Ah… Uh…? What… are you talking about? Nahan, I just… The Star of Nagran, what?”

“I have no intention of going with those who have joined hands with power. We will set out to find the world of the Awakeners on our own.”

Nahan declared this, looking at the pained Awakener.

“It would be nice if the one who betrayed us came to find us before that.”

-

Exactly four days after Kishiar sent a letter to the Cavalry headquarters authorizing the use of Hosanna’s powers to travel south, a group of unfamiliar shadows appeared in front of the Cavalry’s southern branch.

“Commander! We have arrived!”

The sight of their colleagues from the capital surprised all the members guarding the southern branch.

“When did you get here? We didn’t hear any news of your arrival…!”

“What’s happening! How did you get here so quickly?”

“Happy to see you all, but let’s save the talk for later. Where is the Commander?”

Amidst the slightly tired but smiling members from the capital, a tall woman stepped forward to ask. It was Ever, with her long brown hair tightly tied up.

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Chapter 778

“Happy to see you all, but let’s save the talk for later. Where is the Commander?”

Amidst the slightly tired but smiling members from the capital, a tall woman stepped forward to ask. It was Ever, with her long brown hair tightly tied up.

“Hmm… The Commander is probably in the temporary office, having finished the morning’s schedule.”

Ever learned the location of Kishiar’s temporary office from the members of the southern branch. After expressing her thanks, she strode ahead, followed by a procession of those from the capital, a sight to behold.

“Who are those people? They’re reinforcements from the capital?”

The southern passersby and the imperial army, hearing belatedly of the support from the capital, watched from afar and whispered excitedly.

To their eyes, the newly arrived Cavalry members appeared exceptionally disciplined and impressive. However, not everyone fit this description.

“How splendid… But who are those following behind?”

An elderly woman, seemingly too old for such a journey, and a chubby-faced young mage struggling with a large cart of luggage, including the old woman’s.

Trailing them was a young man with ashen hair and a face full of discontent, kicking at the ground as if angry, followed by a young priestess offering words of comfort with a smile.

Beside the priestess walked a petite woman with striking golden-brown bobbed hair and, in contrast, a tall, red-haired man of remarkable beauty.

They were both protectively surrounding someone completely covered in robes from head to toe.

The bobbed-haired woman and red-haired man, clad in Cavalry uniforms, walked at the very end of the line, their detachment from the others piquing the curiosity of onlookers.

The people, sending curious glances, were startled when the ashen-haired man suddenly turned his head, catching their gaze.

“What are you looking at?”

“Ah…”

Startled by his fierce tone, the onlookers turned away like a herd of herbivores encountering a predator. The disgruntled man then suddenly raised an eyebrow and gestured towards someone.

“Hey, you with the antlers.”

“Me, me?”

The one he pointed to was Elpkins, who had hurried to see the newly arrived Cavalry members from the capital. He was startled by the man’s sudden attention.

“Yes, you. What’s with that look?”

“He didn’t mean any harm, just… curious… Sorry if he offended you… Sorry!”

“What nonsense are you talking about?”

Elpkins found the frowning man’s handsome face intimidating, nearly bringing him to tears, when the priestess intervened.

“Sir Enon, please. Your words can be frightening. The gentleman looks unwell. What happened to him?”

“Isn’t that what I just said?”

“When?”

“Just now.”

“No, you didn’t. Look at his face. He didn’t understand. We might be used to your way of speaking, Sir Enon, but it’s hard for newcomers. Ask Kanna and Gakane who’s right…”

“Fine, fine. The kid thinks she’s grown enough to lecture me.”

What seemed like a helping hand was not so. The young priestess, though appearing kind, was verbose. Meanwhile, Elpkins and the others around him lowered their heads, diminishing their presence, and dispersed.

Elpkins, conspicuous with his wings and horns, could not bear to make himself more noticeable. He swallowed his plea for them to just leave him alone, tears welling up inside, and merely grumbled to himself.

That was when his savior appeared.

“…Enon?”

“Sir Yuder!”

“Yuder!”

From behind Elpkins, a savior emerged. The resplendent savior who had saved his life before appeared again today, immaculately dressed, with a pale face that never showed a drop of sweat.

He immediately grasped the situation, seeing Elpkins, bewildered and on the verge of tears, and clicked his tongue sharply.

“Rest first before you start working. Don’t just jump into tasks.”

“I was going to, but look at him. What’s with him? Why does he look so beaten? Did you pick him up from somewhere, after he nearly died ten

times?”

Hearing this, Yuder turned to Elpkins and after a moment of silence, spoke.

“Almost. He’s one of the Awakeners who escaped from an illegal fighting ring. He applied for and passed the second phase of our Cavalry recruitment.”

Elpkins, unable to fully comprehend their words, was confused. He felt fine, having received a lot of divine power since escaping the fighting ring, and couldn’t understand why they thought he was in bad shape. He timidly raised his hand.

“Um, I’m not hurt at all… Can’t I just go…?”

“I knew it!”

His timid voice, about to ask if he could leave, was instantly shattered by Enon’s exclamation. Enon looked at Elpkins with disdain, clicking his tongue.

“When I came in, I saw plenty like him, but he’s the worst of them all! We’re in trouble now!”

“Me, sir…?”

“Is he treatable?”

Ignoring Elpkins, Yuder asked.

“It’ll take time, but it’s not impossible. Anyone you bring is better than you. Why call me from outside the capital when I told you not to? You keep bringing in such cases…!”

“It’s not just for that.”

“What! What else are you planning!”

The scary handsome man was merciless even towards Elpkins' savior. Elpkins gasped as he watched Enon stretch Yuder's cheek. It was a shocking sight for him, though Yuder's expression remained unchanged.

"Gulp…"

"You'll see that often, so it's better to get used to it."

Then, someone patted his back from behind. It was a woman with bobbed hair. Her bright green eyes seemed cheerful and innocent, yet piercing, making Elpkins slightly shrink back.

"Don't be scared. They're not bad people. That's Enon, the sole official pharmacist of the Cavalry, and that priest is Lusan, the only one in the medical unit. The redhead is Gakane Bolunwald from the Shin Division, and I am Kanna Wand, the Deputy Commander of the Jung Division. Knowing who they are makes it less scary, right?"

The identity of the person caught in the middle, covered from head to toe in a robe, was cleverly kept secret, but Elpkins had no intention of paying attention to that.

"Uh… Ah… Yes…"

"And you, escaping from an illegal fighting ring and then immediately joining the second batch of recruitment, that's impressive. Yuder recognizing your skills means we can expect great things from you!"

Confused, Elpkins couldn't recall any mention of Yuder praising his abilities. Yet, he naively nodded in agreement.

"Yes, I was fortunate. Thank you…"

"It wasn't just luck. You had the fate and skill to achieve such a good outcome."

The one who spoke was Gakane, who stood silently beside Kanna. Elpkins, intimidated by his striking appearance, which differed markedly from Enon's, felt a surge of emotion upon seeing his benevolent smile.

“Is that so…?”

“Yes. Enon’s current behavior is merely out of concern for your physical condition, wanting to heal you. So, don’t be afraid, you can comfortably return. You may think you are fully recovered, but Enon has a keen eye for identifying those in need of treatment.”

Kanna, with a secretive smile, shared this as a little secret among the Cavalry members, calling it Enon’s ‘Magical Eyes.’ Even in his bewildered state, Elpkins managed a clumsy smile in response.

“Ha ha…”

“Anyway, don’t worry. If needed, Enon will call for you later.”

“I see… Thank you! Then, I’ll take my leave now.”

Elpkins turned and left them behind. Fortunately, no one called out to stop him. Glancing back midway, he saw Kanna comfortably embracing Yuder and linking arms with Gakane, while Enon stood watching them, arms crossed and a sulky expression on his face.

Truthfully, Elpkins had no idea why the Commander had insisted on bringing them from the capital, nor what plans lay ahead, but seeing them, he felt as if he understood something.

Yuder’s expression was entirely different when he was with others from the south. He was always thought to be indistinguishable due to his constant, similar expressionlessness, but that was not the case.

Even for someone as formidable as Yuder, a divine messenger of war, ‘support’ was clearly necessary. That must be why these people were here.

Just watching them filled Elpkins with a sense of reassurance. He left the place more swiftly and with lighter steps than before.

It was a morning event on the first day the Cavalry members descended from the capital to Charloin in the south.

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Chapter 779

“All of you have worked hard to get here,” said Kishiar, as everyone who had come from the capital finally gathered in one place. This assembly was no small event, as it included most of the key figures currently composing the Cavalry.

Looking over those gathered, Kishiar, with his usual leisurely smile, said, “I’m glad to see everyone in good health. We used a somewhat ‘special’ method of travel this time. Were there any unusual occurrences during the journey?”

The ‘special’ method of travel, of course, referred to the power of Hosanna. Realizing this, Ever, acting as their representative, responded, “Yes, everything went smoothly. The final destination, arranged by you, was within a reasonable range of deviation, allowing us to safely meet the guide.”

Kishiar had shared the news of their arrival with only a handful of people in the capital and had selected a location where a sudden appearance of many wouldn’t attract attention.

At that spot, only Nathan Zuckerman, pre-instructed, was waiting. Not being a member of the Cavalry, his presence didn’t draw the attention of other powers within Charloin, making him an ideal guide. Without him, it would have been impossible to swiftly identify and safely lead the members who landed a bit further than planned to the southern branch.

“It’s good to hear. Having experienced this special mode of travel, I assume you have some thoughts to share compared to the previous methods?” Kishiar asked.

“To be honest… it was truly an incredible ability, beyond imagination,” answered Ever, seriously.

“Transporting so many people instantly, and then recovering in just a few hours. According to Hosanna, he used to transport even larger groups over longer distances and still be fine. I believe his teleportation ability is unmatched by any existing means.”

Hosanna had regained his powers miraculously after hearing the news about Nahan. Though not fully recovered, his ability to teleport was limited to shorter distances, yet the Cavalry managed to travel from the capital to the south in just four days.

The four days were mostly due to Hosanna needing breaks to endure the aftereffects, with the actual travel time being less than half a day. As Ever said, it was an unrivaled ability in terms of transportation.

“Moreover, it seems his power was recovering over the journey, as the recovery time shortened significantly by the last teleportation. Initially, he had to be carried after using his power, but by the time we reached the southern branch, he was walking on his own. Though we put him with Mage Alik’s suppression device and kept his face hidden, we still need to be cautious to prevent his escape,” Ever added.

“What does Deputy Commander Kanna think about Deputy Commander Ever’s concerns?” Kishiar inquired, turning his attention to Kanna, who had been listening quietly.

Kanna, entrusted with escorting Hosanna along with Gakane due to her ability to sense any intention of escape, replied, “When we arrived in the south, I didn’t sense any intention other than nervousness from Hosanna.”

She continued, somewhat tensely, “For now, his biggest emotions seem to be concern for Nahan and skepticism towards the sage. But as Deputy Commanders Ever said, we shouldn’t let our guard down. His thoughts might change once he meets the other Awakeners from the Stars of Nagran, given his fragile mindset.”

“Skepticism towards the sage, that’s an interesting development. Does it seem he’s become aware of his own brainwashing?”

“Ever since he heard about the confrontation between Nahan and the sage, his attitude when speaking about the sage has been changing,” Kanna reported. According to her, Hosanna had recently stopped speaking positively about the sage. Following any negative remarks about the sage, he often complained of headaches and other pains. These symptoms were much milder than when directly questioned by Kishiar and Nathan Zuckerman, but they were frequent nonetheless.

Kanna initially thought these symptoms were due to his recovering powers, but as they persisted even after his powers had somewhat returned, she started to believe they were more likely the aftereffects of his brainwashing breaking down. “But it could be both,” she added.

“It seems there is indeed a change. Then, entering the underground area where the Awakeners’ powers are limited could intensify this change,” mused Kishiar.

“Ah, are you referring to the area that limits the Awakeners’ abilities, which I’ve only heard about?”

“Yes, the very place that has greatly relieved us from surveillance duties,” Kishiar responded, prompting a collective chuckle from the group. Yuder, who had been sitting quietly by Kishiar and observing the meeting, sensed the difficulties hidden in their laughter.

The Cavalry members had spent a significant amount of effort surveilling the captured Awakeners. As the number of subjects to watch grew, their ability to perform their regular duties and training diminished. Despite the inconvenience, it was a necessary task.

The suppression device developed by Alik was still under research and not yet ready for widespread use. The solution found in the south had been a great relief to them.

“Thanks to the exceptional Awakener, Reneve, our efforts have been significantly reduced. Be sure to express your gratitude when you meet her.”

“It’s truly fascinating to think that such an ability exists. The south seems to be home to some remarkable Awakeners,” Kanna remarked, her eyes lighting up with excitement, despite being a rare Awakener herself.

“Perhaps showing this space to Mage Alik could aid in the development of the suppression device. Although, I suspect you already plan to do that, Commander,” she added, seemingly realizing how meticulously their Commander planned.

Without embarrassing her, Kishiar smiled and praised her insight. “Indeed, I intend to have him there, but it’s reassuring to have a Deputy Commanders who understands my intentions. Since we’re on the topic, would you accompany Alik when he visits the area?”

“Certainly! It’s an honor to serve the new master of the divine sword, the one who has shown the ultimate skill in swordsmanship!” Kanna responded enthusiastically, brightening the mood of the meeting. Kishiar, feigning surprise, chuckled softly.

“Is that flattery?”

“No flattery, Commander, just the truth. Even we, the Deputy Commanders, have never seen you unleash your aura. Hearing that others have witnessed it made us initially envious. But now, I’m just glad to belatedly celebrate your achievement! I’ve wanted to say this from the beginning.”

Kanna’s words implied that, though the members were surprised to learn of his status as a Swordmaster, they had no doubt about his capabilities and trusted him implicitly. None of the members showed any negativity towards the fact that Kishiar had hidden his power from them all this time. The question of why he concealed such extraordinary abilities was similarly received without any sign of dissent.

A relaxed atmosphere around the Commander didn’t mean that one could behave too familiarly with him. The members naturally maintained a respectful distance, understanding that if he chose not to speak of something, there must be a good reason for it.

This environment - gentle yet disciplined, where everyone knew what to respect and maintain - was the ideal embodiment of the Cavalry as Kishiar had shaped it.

“Hmm, it seems direct praise really does have its own flavor,” Kishiar remarked with a blatantly cheeky grin. Encouraged by this, Kanna and the other members, as if they couldn’t contain themselves, began to speak up one by one.

“What exactly did you do with your aura back then? I can’t quite picture it from the stories.”

“Is it possible for you to combine your aura with the power of an Awakener?”

“Ah, I wish I had been there in the south to fight alongside…”

Their voices, a mix of genuine admiration and pride for their Commander, soon grew louder, resembling excited children.

Among them was Gakane, whose face flushed at the mention of swords.

“If there’s a chance, we would love to witness your swordsmanship, Commander!”

“Ha ha, alright, I understand. I’ll show you this evening, so calm down.”

“Really? You promise!”

With a wave of his hand, Kishiar calmed the excited members and smoothly changed the topic.

“But before that, we have tasks to attend to. I’ll inform you about the current situation in the south and what we need to do. Pay attention, and remember, nothing said here should be accidentally leaked to the outside.”

The previously relaxed atmosphere instantly tightened up. Everyone straightened their postures, alert and eager not to miss a single word from Kishiar.

Yuder, already familiar with much of this information through direct experience and his own inputs, didn’t need to focus as intensely. He observed his colleagues, visibly tense yet confident, and then turned his gaze to Kishiar, who continued his explanations and instructions without any hesitation.

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Chapter 780

He observed his colleagues, visibly tense yet confident, and then turned his gaze to Kishiar, who continued his explanations and instructions without any hesitation.

Even after hearing about Yuder's dream, Kishiar hadn't changed much. It wasn't so much about hiding his feelings or deliberately not speaking. Rather, it felt like he was waiting for the time to pass, following the decision he had made, until he could be more certain.

And, in fact, Yuder felt the same way.

'It can't be helped. For now, there's just too little information about the nature of that dream. It's not something that can be understood with mere effort, so waiting is the best we can do right now.'

Knowing that they were both concerned about each other, they tried not to repeat the mistakes of the past. All that remained was to wait for more information to gather without hiding their feelings and attitudes.

It was a wait without promise, but strangely, this fact no longer felt overly stifling or anxious. Yuder thought it might be because he had shared the dream story with Kishiar.

Talking about it didn't solve anything. But sometimes, the mere act of doing something gives it meaning.

Kishiar's unchanging calmness after learning about the dream, and the way he looked at him with sometimes deeper eyes, or touched him gently without avoiding his gaze, gave such meaning to Yuder.

'The last expression I saw in the backlight bothers me, but… If there's something he wants to tell me, he'll do it eventually, just like I did.'

Yuder could decide not to step back and speak his mind because Kishiar had always been by his side, not rushing him and giving him trust. So, he planned to do the same.

It was a new sensation to realize that it was okay not to force himself to endure even though it was certainly painful.

Embracing the unavoidable wait as just that, a wait, and not as an escape, Yuder quietly observed the man who might be feeling emotions not so different from his own.

“Yuder!”

After the meeting, Yuder was immediately surrounded by his close colleagues. With Kanna, Gakane, Ever, Devran, the Eldore siblings, and even Pruelle and Revlin gathered, it almost felt like they were not in the south but in the capital.

Kishiar had included all the personnel who had been on the mission in the capital last time in this support list. Like Ever, it was to give them another chance to redeem themselves for their lingering regrets and resentments.

Knowing this, even the usually playful Eldore siblings were quiet and serious throughout the meeting today. Just seeing that was enough to understand how much they valued this support mission.

“You look a bit thinner than before. Have you been eating well?”

Ever asked that as soon as she saw him, though her face looked much thinner than before. Yuder suspected it was due to the heartache from the incident with the sage.

“I’m fine. But what about you, Ever… You’ve taken on quite a few significant missions this time. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“You’re not asking that because you think I’ll say I’m not confident, are you?”

Ever wrinkled his nose and laughed playfully.

“The Commander gave us a chance to redeem ourselves. Whether it’s the sage or anyone else, we won’t let them slip away this time.”

“We feel the same.”

Hinn interjected with a stubborn face. Beside her, Finn nodded, clenching his small but terrifyingly powerful fist.

Yuder turned his gaze away from their fiery eyes. Devran, feeling shy, scratched his head and began to speak.

“Uh-hum, there was a mountain of work piled up here. I might not know much else, but I’m quite good at discreetly observing my surroundings. Leave that to me.”

However, that shy expression of his shattered completely under Finn’s innocently devilish questioning.

“Devran, what are you planning to disguise as this time? Since we’re in the South, maybe a fisherman?”

“No, Finn. It’s going to be a tavern this time. They pay well, you know.”

“…You little rascals. I’m not doing this just for the money, okay? Don’t talk about someone’s special information gathering techniques like that! Huh?!”

“Who was it again that said making extra money on the side was quite profitable?”

“And who was the one excitedly talking about skipping training in front of Yuder to do a side job?”

“Hey you brats!”

As Devran began to shout in anger, the Eldore siblings scampered away like squirrels. As Devran chased after them, the others expressed their concern in voices mixed with worry and laughter.

Seizing the moment, this time Revlin and Pruelle approached Yuder.

“Yuder! Did you hear that I finally passed as an official member?”

“Me too.”

Thanks to their time as temporary members, their demeanor had become much more relaxed compared to before. But above all, it was their expressions that had changed the most.

“I heard. Congratulations to both of you.”

At Yuder’s congratulatory words, their expressions became even more deeply reflective.

“Um… Haha. When I heard the news, I immediately remembered the day I first met Yuder, and suddenly that memory came to mind. That’s why I wanted to tell you in person.”

“Ah, I felt the same way!”

A blushing Revlin hesitated, fidgeting with his hands before asking.

“So, about that… Yuder… Can you talk to us more casually? Just like you do with the other members!”

“…”

“Uh, I heard that if you ask Yuder directly, he’ll do it… but if it’s uncomfortable…”

Revlin’s face turned red, thinking the silence was a negative response. However, Yuder’s silence was simply because what they asked was so unexpectedly straightforward.

“No, it’s fine. If that’s what you want, I’ll do it.”

“Ah! That’s a relief! I’ve always envied the other members who could talk like this, I’m so happy right now… I mean, happy!”

The encounters with the two had been quite intense, but Yuder hadn't expected them to feel this strongly.

'Somehow… this feels reminiscent of the time with Sunz and Emon.'

However, not wanting to dampen the spirits of the new members, Yuder simply nodded silently. Pruelle smiled at this.

"It's amazing. I never thought such a day would come back then, but it really did happen."

Pruelle and Revlin exchanged glances, smiling with fresh emotion. But then, Pruelle's expression turned slightly somber.

"Although I didn't perfectly complete the first mission I was assigned after becoming an official member."

"That's…"

"There's no need to console me. I'm aware of how much I lacked. But… I'm a bit worried about Deputy Commander Beck…"

Pruelle's eyes cautiously drifted towards Ever, who was busy mediating the commotion between the Eldore siblings and Devran and seemed too preoccupied to notice.

Pruelle chuckled softly at the sight, then suddenly became startled and tensed up when his gaze met Yuder's silent one.

"…Ah! Of course, I know someone like a newcomer shouldn't worry about someone like her! It's just, after the last incident, she seemed to be pushing herself too hard, and that's a bit… Ah, what am I saying. Can you just forget it? I think I spoke too presumptuously."

"I understand your concern for Ever's condition."

"Ah, do you, really?"

Pruelle was once again surprised by the simple expression of concern. He blinked at Yuder as if seeing him anew, and then suddenly slapped his own cheek.

"…What was I thinking, saying such things while the Commander is here?"

"You look quite tired. Perhaps it would be best to rest."

While the suggestion was made out of concern for Pruelle's apparent fatigue, Pruelle vehemently shook his head. Looking at his flushed face, one would be hard-pressed to believe he was a man of intelligence.

"No, it's not that. I actually wanted to ask you something. Based on the information discussed in the meeting, the First Princess of Herne is collaborating with the Cavalry. I wonder, could she be someone like us?"

"Hm… Have you ever met or heard about her before?"

"No, never. We've never really been in the forefront of social circles. I've heard rumors, but nothing more than she's the esteemed only daughter of the Herne family."

"Me too. My parents and brothers were not fond of the Herne family… Of course, they weren't particularly fond of other families either."

Though he added this with a nonchalant laugh, it was a reminder that apart from dealings with the imperial family, the relationships among the four great ducal families were not exactly amicable.

"However, if there's someone like us there, I would definitely want to help."

Revlin spoke with a bright face, suggesting that their own experiences could be helpful to another. Excluding the fact that Princess Myra of Herne was not an Awakener, it was a commendable attitude to have.

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Chapter 781

Revlin spoke with a bright face, suggesting that their own experiences could be helpful to another. Excluding the fact that Princess Myra of Herne was not an Awakener, it was a commendable attitude to have.

“The First Princess Myra is indeed our ally, but she is not an Awakener.”

Moreover, with no rivals left and barring any major incidents, her succession as the next Duchess of Herne seemed almost assured. Even if she were an Awakener, she wouldn’t have been able to join the Cavalry.

“Ah, I see. Well, it’s rare to find someone like us. Still, I’m curious about her. I wonder if we’ll see her again soon.”

Revlin appeared sheepish, embarrassed as if he had let his emotions lead. Yuder quietly spoke up.

“Thanks to you two, this second recruitment drive saw many more noble applicants than before. Even those not from the Herne family will need guidance from someone who has been in their shoes.”

“Ah…”

Revlin’s face lit up again. Sensing his excessive joy, Yuder felt the need to interject a dose of reality.

“As a newcomer, taking on such responsibilities might leave you short on time for personal training. Are you sure that’s alright?”

“I know the Cavalry is a tough place to keep up with just group training… No, I know it! But fitting in with the group is also crucial. I’ll work hard on both fronts.”

Yuder wanted to respond that this was not out of concern but to help him face reality. However, seeing Revlin’s happy face, he decided to remain

silent. It was astonishing how such a pleasant boy could come from a family like Apeto.

Pruelle and Revlin briefly shared updates from their families. Except for Nipollen, who followed him to the south but did not attend the meeting, Pruelle's younger siblings were said to be doing very well. Although the Duke of Tain still couldn't accept his situation and committed misdeeds on a regular basis, looking at Pruelle's attitude, even that seemed to be enjoyable to him.

"At first, he just sent threatening letters, but now he's resorting to direct harm through hired goons. Thankfully, our servants are loyal and he can only hire outsiders."

"Is everything okay? What's the extent of the damage?"

"It's fine. No one's hurt. We were prepared for this. Each time he tries something, we gather evidence and file additional charges. He should realize soon enough that he's only harming himself… But until then, enlightening him is a child's duty."

Pruelle said this with a smile, his eyes bright yet cold.

Revlin's situation was similar yet different.

"Since father fell ill, only Aishes's people have been taking care of him, so I've never seen him. People from the family occasionally come asking if I should check on him, but… I don't really want to. Aishes seems to prefer it that way too."

It seemed that Revlin, having left the family, had no intention of returning while the current Duke and Aishes were in charge.

Unbeknownst to Revlin, the Duke of Apeto had fallen ill because Aishes coveted the Dukedom. But such ill-gotten gains wouldn't bless Aishes for long.

‘The last time I saw him, his condition looked terribly poor. Despite witnessing his uncle perish in fruitless research, he was the type who would still consider the same methods if it meant healing himself…’

Yuder thought it was time to warn Revlin about this.

After collecting his thoughts, Yuder addressed Revlin.

“Revlin.”

“Huh? Oh, yes, what is it?”

“Although I am an outsider, I think it would be wise not to completely sever your concern for your family, despite not wanting to return. If something happens in the future and you’re unaware, it could put you at a disadvantage.”

It was natural for Aishes to hope that Revlin would lose interest in the family and not return. However, Revlin didn’t need to comply with that. Quiet for now, Aishes was still Revlin’s enemy, and an enemy’s desires often spell harm for oneself.

After delivering a general warning, Yuder added softly,

“…Of course, you are a member of the Cavalry, and we all will support you.”

“That’s actually something I wanted to say to Revlin too,” Pruelle interjected timely and gently.

“I understand your reluctance to look back at a family you’ve left, but you know, no matter what we think, others won’t easily believe it. You have Nion who trusts you and came here with you, and us as well. I hope you’re not too afraid to reconsider.”

For Pruelle, there were still younger siblings in the family who could be reliable allies. However, Revlin had no such allies left behind, which was a significant difference.

“Ah…”

The face of the delicate boy flushed for a moment, then hardened with resolve as he nodded.

“…You’re right. Disliking it doesn’t change the fact that it’s where I come from… Even if not Aishes, other family members could seek me out anytime. Yes, I understand. I’ll do as you say. Thank you, everyone.”

Revlin took the warning well, which relieved Yuder.

He advised Revlin to immediately inform the Cavalry if Aishes or anyone from Apeto’s side attempted anything suspicious. As Yuder was about to leave, someone called out to him.

“Yuder!”

“Kanna?”

“Is your conversation over? Can you do me a favor?”

The fact that Kanna had waited, given the trustworthy company, suggested her request was highly confidential.

“What is it?”

“I’d like you to go to Hosanna.”

Surprised at the unexpected name, Yuder blinked, and Kanna leaned in to whisper.

“Actually, ever since Hosanna regained his abilities, he’s been wanting to see you. The first thing he asked after arriving here was if he could meet you.”

“…Me?”

Yuder wondered what this was about, but there seemed to be a reason.

“As the brainwashing gradually faded, he seems to have developed a personal matter he wants to discuss. He probably thinks you’re more trustworthy than I am or even Commander Kishiar.”

‘It’s quite a situation.’

Was it because he knew Yuder had helped him awaken from the coma? Or because of his memory of standing against Nahan?

Whichever it was, Yuder found it unexpected that Hosanna would prefer him over the amiable Kanna or Commander Kishiar. After briefly considering his schedule for the day, Yuder nodded in agreement.

“I understand. But not now, tell him I’ll come by later tonight. I’m tied up with other matters at the moment.”

Hosanna, the sole confidant of Nahan and the only one among their fellow Star of Nagran who knew his hidden past.

What could he possibly want to discuss that he called out for Yuder?

Yuder turned away, swallowing the unknowable questions that arose within him.

-

Inside a luxurious carriage, embossed with the Diarca family’s coat of arms, departing the capital and heading south.

Kiolle da Diarca pondered deeply, ‘Why has my fate turned out this way?’

He had always been the youngest son of the Diarca family, never involved in significant matters. Important affairs were handled by his father, older brother, and sisters. Kiolle’s daily life consisted of nothing more than commuting to the Imperial Knights and practicing swordsmanship.

But why?

Why was he, a representative of both the Diarca family and the Imperial Knights, carrying the grand title of emissary of the Crown Prince, sitting in this carriage, heading to the undesired South?

“No matter how much I think about it… this isn’t right. It just isn’t…”

“What do you mean it isn’t right, Sir Kiolle?”

A cold voice echoed from behind him. Kiolle stiffly turned his head. A boy, wrapped from head to toe in a luxurious cloak, sat with his arms crossed, giving Kiolle a chilling gaze.

Despite his beautiful yet youthful and fierce face, Kiolle couldn’t help but clench his teeth.

This boy had always been the most infuriating part of Kiolle’s already maddening life.

His name was Katchian La Orr, the Empire’s sole and noble Crown Prince, someone who should never be here.

“It’s nothing… I was just, thinking out loud.”

Why was Crown Prince Katchian here? The answer was simple.

He had snuck onto Kiolle’s carriage after escaping the palace, driven by a single-minded desire to help the ‘sage’ who had healed him.

‘What in the world… This is driving me insane!’

Kiolle mentally shed tears of frustration, recalling the day they departed.

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Chapter 782

That day, the weather had been dismal from the start. Dark clouds loomed since morning, casting an ominous aura, and true to that foreboding feeling, his father suddenly dropped a bolt from the blue.

“Kiolle. You have been confirmed as the representative of the Imperial Knights to head to the South. His Imperial Majesty and His Highness the Crown Prince have consented, so prepare immediately to depart tomorrow.”

“What? Father, what do you mean? To the South?”

“Have you not heard the disturbing news coming from the South? It is related to that.”

Kiolle, of course, had heard about the events in the South. Monsters appearing suddenly in the heart of cities, someone from the Herne Ducal family dying, the feats of the Cavalry, and Duke Peletta turning out to be not just the owner of a divine sword, but a swordmaster and so on.

He hadn’t paid much heed to the Cavalry’s exploits, given the monstrous Yuder Aile in their ranks, nor was he much stirred by Duke Peletta’s rumor, not having witnessed it firsthand. The rest, who lived or died, seemed irrelevant to him.

He knew that his father, Duke Diarca, planned to send someone in light of these events… but he never imagined he would be the one chosen.

Kiolle, with rigid eyes, scanned his surroundings. It was a rare family meal, with all eyes inevitably turning to him. Eldest brother Kironne, the implicit heir, sat solemnly without showing emotion, but the younger siblings reacted differently.

They all barely concealed their subtle shock and envy at Kiolle. Especially the third sibling, who received the least attention from their father, seemed almost capable of igniting someone with his glare.

Kiolle, proud to a fault, wasn’t fazed by such stares, but he was indeed reluctant about the situation. That was the issue.

Whenever Duke Diarca sent Kiolle out of the capital, it was usually to punish him for some mischief. The last time he left the capital, it was a forced training trip to the East, an experience he preferred not to recall. The very thought of that incident was enough to jolt him awake from sleep.

‘I hate leaving the capital! The roads are muddy, sleep is uncomfortable, everything is just inconvenient! And besides, he is there too!’

That demon of the Cavalry! Yuder Aile! Remembering him, Kiolle involuntarily shivered. The deeply ingrained fear was always effective, no matter when or where.

After much contemplation, Kiolle attempted to decline as politely as he could.

“Father, I truly appreciate your words, but wouldn’t one of my elder brothers or sisters be more suitable for this task?”

“So you express your reluctance to leave home in such a manner. I don’t expect you to do it perfectly, of course. But in the current situation, there’s no one more suitable than you, the only member of our family in the Imperial Knights.”

Duke Diarca saw through Kiolle’s shallow pretense at once. As Kiolle fell silent, a sense of vindication flickered in the eyes of his envious siblings. However, they failed to notice the significant change in the way Duke Diarca looked at Kiolle.

“But… I am currently the escort of His Highness the Crown Prince. How uncomfortable he would be without me.”

“His Highness the Crown Prince has already agreed to let you go.”

“Really, Father?”

Even the surrounding attendants, who the Crown Prince distrusted and often treated harshly, had quickly agreed to send him away? Kiolle found this hard to believe.

“You’ve realized that your selection signifies His Highness the Crown Prince’s deep concern for the imperial citizens. It’s a relief that those arrogant healers, at the very least, seem to have restored His Highness’s mind to its former clarity.”

“…”

“The Emperor’s approval has already been given, so stop your nonsense and quietly prepare to leave.”

‘Damn it…!’

Kiolle, unable to defy his father, reluctantly agreed. Duke Diarca observed this with a thinly veiled satisfaction, his eyes narrowing into a pleased smile.

“Stop there, Kiolle.”

As he was slipping away after dinner, Kiolle was caught by his third brother.

“Don’t get too arrogant because Father has taken a slight liking to you after the last incident. This is merely a test. Do you think you can hide your foolish nature just because you act a bit more mature?”

Had it been the old times, Kiolle would have retorted, but since becoming unable to speak harshly to others, his patience had forcibly grown. As Kiolle, frowning, attempted to ignore him and move on, his brother’s face reddened with anger.

“No matter how much you’re favored, you can’t take the eldest brother’s place! Remember the lowly origins of your mother!”

“…”

At these words, Kiolle stopped dead in his tracks. He turned to look at his brother, clearly angry, but again, he didn't retaliate. His level of patience was entirely different from what it had been just a year ago.

Unknowingly sensing Kiolle's growth, the third brother flinched, but Kiolle, desperately clinging to his vow, spoke up.

"So? What about it? What does that have to do with this mission? When did I ever say I wanted to take the eldest's place?"

"What, what?"

"If you have evidence, say it. If not, just go and sleep. Aren't you ashamed, as a member of the Diarca family, acting like this? Unlike you, who can't even get a word in with Father, I have too much to do and am tired. I'll be going now."

It pained him to beat around the bush like this, but to others, his retreating figure seemed like a young man who had matured enough to swallow his anger.

The third brother, not wanting to admit he had been outmaneuvered, belatedly clenched his fist and shouted.

"You… how dare you… Kiolle! Stop right there! You insolent brat. I will… I will reveal your true nature…!"

Regardless of his brother's ranting, Kiolle gloomily returned to his room to prepare for his journey South. His servants, noticing the newfound sturdiness in their young master, were elated that he was finally entrusted with a major family responsibility, though their congratulatory words fell on deaf ears.

Since he had to leave the next day, Kiolle still had to attend to his duties today. Reporting to the Bright Palace, he met with the knights who would guard the Crown Prince in his absence, and gave them a brief and rather informal handover of his duties.

The Crown Prince, whom he met to bid farewell, looked a bit pale but surprisingly calm and composed compared to usual. Knowing that he had gone to great lengths to save some fraudulent healers recently, Kiolle felt an uneasy twinge even as he observed this.

‘Those frauds haven’t brainwashed Father, that’s for sure. But the Crown Prince…’

Kiolle wanted to believe otherwise, but he found it hard to be certain. His mind was uneasy, especially as the Crown Prince before him appeared to be in normal condition.

Recently, the Crown Prince had submitted a report, accusing culprits of an intrusion at the Sun Palace based on a list prepared by Duke Diarca, only to have it rejected. Afterwards, an anonymous tip related to the real culprits, and seemingly involving the Crown Prince’s fraudulent healers, mysteriously reached him. Enraged like a wildfire, the Crown Prince vehemently vowed to capture the liar who tried to frame his healers, leading to several attendants being dismissed.

The former Crown Prince would have suspected the healers too in such a situation, but he had been uncharacteristically lenient, not even bothering to search for the healers who had left the palace. Besides this, there were several other odd behaviors, but aiding those frauds to escape from Duke Diarca and sending them to the South was the most significant.

‘Could it be… he’s already been deceived? Then what should I do? And what about Father…’

His thoughts were interrupted as the Crown Prince spoke.

“Sir Kiolle. I hear you leave tomorrow. It’s an early departure.”

“Yes. My father said the situation in the South is urgent.”

“I’m aware of the situation. It’s regrettable, but our imperial citizens are in trouble, and as a pillar of this empire, I must do my part. Don’t forget that you carry my name on your shoulders.”

“…Yes, I understand. I will do my utmost not to bring any dishonor to you, Your Highness.”

“And when exactly are you planning to leave? At dawn, I presume?”

“Yes. I plan to depart before sunrise.”

Kiolle, not realizing that it was unusual for the Crown Prince to ask such questions, naively answered.

“It’ll be tough. I’ve already arranged for your smooth passage through the South Gate. Just show your face to the officer in charge and exchange greetings, and you should be able to leave right away.”

“That’s very considerate… Thank you, Your Highness.”

“Think nothing of it. You are representing me, after all, so this is only natural.”

The Crown Prince smiled. Kiolle swallowed his unease and smiled back.

The next morning, just before dawn, at the city’s last checkpoint, the South Gate guard post.

Even as Kiolle exchanged greetings with the officer in charge and prepared to leave, he failed to notice anything unusual. However, after leaving the capital and reaching the first stop, he went to open the door of the carriage storing his personal belongings and was shocked to find an intruder, like a rat scurrying for cover.

“Who are you!”

He drew his sword and knocked the figure over. Thinking it might be an assassin, Kiolle quickly subdued them and removed the cloth covering the body. To his utter astonishment, the face revealed was the last he expected, prompting him to cry out in shock.

“…Your Highness!”

“Ugh, cough… You dare… do that to me…”

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Chapter 783

“Your Highness!”

Coughing harshly and with pain etching his face, Crown Prince Katchian glared fiercely. Kiolle quickly supported him, lowering his voice in urgent inquiry.

“Why on earth are you here, Your Highness…?!”

“I had to see for myself how things were unfolding and to help those in need!”

“Your Highness?”

“Duke Diarca always told me to wait and everything would turn out fine. But he never listened or even remembered what I asked for! I’ve been patient until now, but I won’t overlook this. If I remain silent this time, even Ajihen Toom, who has truly been on my side, will disappear! Do you think I’ll just stand by and let that happen?”

“Ajihen Toom? That scamm… I mean, the healer?”

Kiolle nearly called him a scammer, a moment of supreme self-restraint in his life, so astonishing that even Yuder would have been shocked. But Kiolle was so dumbfounded that he didn’t think anything of it.

“Didn’t you see, Your Highness? That man… he was part of the group behind the explosion in the capital, and moreover, he’s an Awakener! He’s not worth saving to this extent!”

“Your dislike for the Awakener is your own, Sir Kiolle. Not mine.”

“Your Highness? What do you mean…”

“I trust an Awakener who shows me true loyalty and is ready to risk their life for me more than those who try to control me like a puppet.”

The Crown Prince then revealed something shocking.

“Initially, I didn’t trust him either. But before leaving Bright Palace, Ajihen Toom confessed everything to me, sincerely saying his treatment was done.”

“What did he say?”

“He told me that it wasn’t that I’ve never had loyal people around me, but they were driven away by those close to me, supposedly for my protection. He fears he will meet the same fate.”

The Crown Prince’s eyes sparkled as if he’d finally found the answer he’d been seeking. There was no trace of the resentment and anger he’d shown when lashing out at his servants.

“Sure enough, attempts were made to separate him from me afterward, just like a prophecy. After witnessing all this, I’ve decided to trust him. No one else has ever understood and cared for me this sincerely.”

“But Your Highness, that’s not it…”

Kiolle knew that those fraudsters had first tried to ingratiate themselves with Duke Diarca before the Crown Prince. The thought of a mind-manipulating charlatan posing as a healer and swearing fealty was laughable.

Yet, when Kiolle tried to argue, it seemed the Crown Prince heard nothing, only returning sharper anger.

“Sir Kiolle, did you really think I was unaware of your surveillance of Ajihen Toom and his associates, on Duke Diarca’s orders, seeking a chance to oust them?”

“That’s…!”

Kiolle was at a loss. Duke Diarca had indeed ordered him to keep an eye on the sage's group to prevent mischief. But how could he admit that his vigilant watch was also due to a temporary alliance with a demonic entity of the Cavalry?

As Kiolle hesitated and fell silent, the Crown Prince raised his voice, seizing the opportunity.

"The Duke appointed you as the representative for this matter because you're the one who knows Ajihen Toom the closest. As soon as you headed south, you must have planned to eliminate him rather than help!"

"That's not true! Why would I, of all people, do something like that? I had no intention of lifting a finger in that bothersome affair after reaching the south!"

"Despite your well-known filial devotion to the Duke, you're trying hard to deny it, I see."

"It's the truth!"

Holding back his anger and trying to phrase his words carefully was proving to be an overwhelming challenge for him. The more he spoke, the more his words came out sounding like the epitome of a lazy, worthless noble.

"Deny it all you want, it doesn't matter. In the end, you'll follow my orders."

"Your Highness?"

"Do you think I came here without any purpose?"

Torn between wanting to respond and considering the merit of remaining silent, Kiolle struggled internally. Fortunately, before he could answer, the Crown Prince spoke up.

"The moment you were chosen for this task, I thought it was the 'chance to break free' that Ajihen Toom had mentioned. Anyone else from the Diarca

family might not understand, but you're different, aren't you?"

"What are you implying…?"

"I know you're harboring a shameful secret that you can't reveal to your family."

The moment Kiolle saw the Crown Prince's narrowed eyes, he was struck by a lightning bolt of shock.

'Impossible? No, it can't be. Nobody knows about my oath with that demon of the Cavalry… That's the first condition of the agreement!'

Kiolle realized he couldn't disclose the events to anyone. But had the secret been revealed without his knowledge, would it be considered a breach of the oath? His face turned white and expressionless as the Crown Prince whispered mockingly.

"Imagine the shock the old Duke would feel upon learning his beloved youngest son is a debauchee. Especially since he's someone who values stiff, old-fashioned propriety. Such tragic news might lay him low, or worse, he might decide to disown you entirely."

The words flew in one ear and out the other of the tense, pale Kiolle.

'…I'm what, exactly?'

A debauchee?

It took Kiolle a moment to find his voice, still dumbfounded.

"Debauchee?"

"If you value your honor and life, you'll do well to handle this. The reason for my visit and the aftermath are your responsibility. Any mistakes, and you'll be the one to blame."

A victorious smile spread across the Crown Prince's handsome face.

“As my bodyguard, I trust you can handle at least this much, right?”

Only after hearing the Crown Prince’s veiled threat of revealing the truth did Kiolle fully grasp the dire situation he was in.

“Just wait, Your Highness. I am not a debauchee…!”

“Oh? Then who was that person you secretly slipped away with during the harvest festival and the last party?”

“…”

“I already know you’re not the sharpest tool. Don’t bother denying it and make things worse.”

‘But it’s not true… it’s really not!’

Kiolle’s mind flashed to the one common face he had encountered on both of those occasions.

He was infuriated at the injustice of being misunderstood as a debauchee because of Yuder Aile, and even more so because he couldn’t clarify the misunderstanding.

The Crown Prince, having fled the palace to save a mere swindler and hiding in a carriage, now seemed to be under the sway of that very person, displaying behavior that suggested he was brainwashed. Kiolle knew if Duke Diarca learned of this, his end would be sealed.

‘I’ll be blamed for failing my duties as a guard. Maybe it’s better to be known as a debauchee… But no! Why do these things always happen to me!’

For someone unaccustomed to such deep thinking, it felt like his head would burst. Filled with indignation, Kiolle discreetly escorted the Crown Prince to his carriage, away from prying eyes. He excused the Crown Prince’s presence to the servants as a secret imperial attendant, but whether they believed him was another matter.

As they neared their southern destination, Kiolle, slumped in the carriage, pondered the situation to the best of his ability.

‘Firstly, it seems the Crown Prince indeed suffered something at the hands of that swindler. Once we reach the south, I must meet with that demon. Being an Awakener, he might know how to reverse this.’

Kiolle had no desire to involve the Cavalry in the south if he could avoid it. Yet, it seemed fate had other plans for him.

Lost in thought, Kiolle was jolted from his reverie by the sudden, harsh stop of the carriage.

“What’s the matter? Why have we stopped abruptly?”

“Apologies, my lord. A carriage ahead has blocked the road!”

The most direct and well-maintained route to their destination was narrow, allowing only a few carriages to pass at a time. Now, a line of black carriages had unexpectedly blocked their path, as explained by the coachman. Kiolle, infuriated, demanded to know who would dare block the Diarca family’s way.

“The carriages are covered in black, making it impossible to identify the family.”

Could it be some kind of funeral carriage? Kiolle gritted his teeth, opened the carriage door, and stepped out. partly to escape the company of the seemingly brainwashed Crown Prince.

Outside, a row of massive black carriages indeed blocked the road, seemingly not belonging to an ordinary family.

‘What in the world?’

As Kiolle narrowed his eyes, a servant dressed in fine clothes leaped from the largest carriage and approached. Kiolle’s eyes widened upon recognizing the crest embroidered on the servant’s clothes.

‘That crest… Herne?’

-

“Welcome, Yuder. It’s been a long time since we last met.”

“Yes, it’s good to see you in good health, Alik.”

“Ah, it’s nothing. Haha.”

Yuder greeted Alik, whom he hadn’t seen in a while, and glanced around the small temporary research lab that Alik had set up in the southern branch, his face slightly haggard but smiling.

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Chapter 784

Yuder greeted Alik with a warm smile, encountering him after a long separation. Alik, his face slightly worn, chuckled as he introduced his modest, temporary research space established in the southern branch.

“Who would have thought you’d offer me not just one, but two rooms? Therefore, one is for Mage Hellem, and the other for myself. Ah, a research lab of my own! Temporary it may be, but it feels like a dream!”

“Have you never had a lab of your own before?”

“Indeed, it’s not because I lacked money or my master was stingy. It’s due to the traditions among mages!”

According to Alik, mages under a master’s tutelage rarely had the opportunity to have their own labs until they gained recognition or independence from their master. If the master was the root, the apprentice was like a branch extending from it, as Yuder attentively listened, picking up on a particular word in the lengthy explanation.

“The relationship between a direct master and apprentice among mages is considered special, different from just being part of the same alliance or organization. In the mages’ terms… um, like a ‘Spiritual father,’ so to speak.”

‘Spiritual father’ - a term used to refer to the Archmage Luma in the diary of the First Duke Tain. It was surprising to hear it still in use, thinking it a phrase of the old times.

Seizing the moment, Yuder asked Alik if he knew anything relevant.

“Fascinating. Then, did the Archmage Luma also have disciples who called him ‘Spiritual father’?”

“The Archmage Luma? Hmm, an interesting question indeed. In fact, the term ‘Spiritual father’ is believed to have originated from him.”

“Is that so?”

“Since ancient times, mages called Archmages during the Empire’s early days preferred to teach a broader audience rather than just a few close disciples. Their aim wasn’t just to impart their magic knowledge, but to rescue those mages suffering and shunned due to their unrecognizable powers.”

It was a familiar story, perhaps because of Yuder’s previous visit to the graveyard where the secret diary of the First Duke Tain lay buried. However, this time the story resonated differently.

It felt like realizing that old tales, as recorded in ancient documents, shared considerable commonalities with the present.

Alik’s story, while discussing the early days’ mages, had striking parallels with the current activities of the Cavalry.

“However, the Archmage Luma was different. He was close not only to the First Emperor and Empress but also taught magic personally to their four children, stemming from the fact that the First Empress was a mage herself. This practice is considered the origin of the court mages who continue to teach the princes and princesses to this day. It was from this relationship that the term ‘Spiritual father’ for a master spread widely.”

“I see.”

“Yet, it’s a pity that none of the four who received direct tutelage delved deeply into the magic world. The First Duke Tain was somewhat renowned for his research in those times, but alas, scarce records remain. Thus, the lineage of the Archmage Luma’s direct disciples seems to have been lost.”

Clearly, like Alik, modern mages were unaware of the First Duke Tain’s research aims and achievements.

“I’m not sure if the Commander has already informed you, but Alik, you will be in charge of the continuous production and research of the ability suppression devices here. I heard you brought the quantity already produced in the capital. Have you delivered it yet?”

“No, I was about to, but I wasn’t told whom to give it to, so I still have it.”

“Then give it to me. I will take care of the delivery.”

“Really? It’s quite heavy… But with your wind ability, Yuder, it should be fine.”

Alik’s initial concern quickly turned into a relieved smile.

“You have no idea how hard it was for me to carry those along with Mage Hellem’s monster. I thought I was going to die. Both are related to research, so I couldn’t entrust them to others, and I couldn’t let the elderly Mage Hellem carry them, so naturally…”

“Wait, Alik. What monster are you talking about?”

Yuder, interrupting him, raised his hand inquisitively. Alik blinked in surprise and then replied.

“Penpen, the long-tailed black monster. You caught it yourself, remember?”

“You brought it here with you?”

“I thought you knew. It’s actively involved in the research, so Mage Hellem brought it along. The prototypes of my suppression devices are also placed with its enclosure. You should see for yourself.”

“Why there… No, never mind. No need to answer.”

Yuder recalled Mage Hellem, who seemed like a kindly old woman. As a former head of the court mages, she too had the characteristic mage-ly trait of prioritizing research above all else.

“Mage Hellem! Are you there? I’m coming in!”

Alik knocked on the door connecting to his lab and entered without waiting for a response.

“Is it alright to just walk in like that?”

“At this time, she’s likely writing in her research journal. She wouldn’t hear us knocking anyway, so it’s better to just enter.”

Alik’s calm reply showed the depth of experience gained from his long apprenticeship under Master Thais Yulman.

As expected, Mage Hellem was engrossed in writing something, surrounded by several open books on her desk, unaware of their arrival.

“Mage Hellem. I’m here. Yuder is with me.”

“Hmm? Ah. It’s been a while.”

Noticing Yuder, Mage Hellem adjusted her glasses, smiling warmly.

“I suppose you’re not here to see me, so what brings you?”

“We’ve come to help move Alik’s suppression devices.”

“Ah, those wildly unpredictable toys.”

“They’re not toys, Mage Hellem. They’re masterpieces of my research.”

Alik protested meekly, but Mage Hellem seemed to pay no heed.

“They’re over there. Take them. But you look thinner than a skewer since I last saw you. I wonder if you’re eating well.”

Though they had barely met since Yuder joined the Cavalry, she had always been surprisingly kind to him. The only issue was her constant remarks about him losing weight.

“I am eating well.”

“You might not be as robust as our lord or Nathan, but you should at least put on some weight like Alik. I worry seeing you thinner each time.”

Yuder’s weight, in fact, had not changed at all, but to the eyes of a mage accustomed to the stature of individuals like Kishiar and Nathan Zuckerman, he appeared otherwise. Yuder glanced at Alik, who looked slightly pale but still had chubby cheeks, and then fell silent.

Mage Hellem expressed concern that the lord would not neglect his assistant’s meals, but thankfully, she did not dwell further on the topic after emphasizing the importance of eating well even amidst busyness.

“The south is so much warmer compared to the north and the capital, which I like. It’s just a pity that I can’t stay here forever. Earlier, I noticed some clueless fellows wandering outside, conducting some sort of investigation. Turns out they’re from the Sapphire Mage Union.”

It seemed Mage Hellem was curious about the Sapphire Mage Union. Yuder nodded and explained the task he had entrusted to them.

“Yes, I asked them to investigate any changes in the flow of magic energy in the area due to the recent monster appearance.”

“From what I saw, I’m not sure if they can handle it properly… If it proves unsatisfactory, could you tell the lord I’ll take over?”

Yuder would welcome Mage Hellem’s assistance. She had already inspected the monster’s carcass upon arrival and promised to report as soon as her investigation was complete. Yuder felt anew that it was a good decision to have summoned her here.

‘Now, all that’s left is to move the suppression devices.’

Yuder approached the area where a cage covered with a black cloth was located. The rustling sound inside indicated that Penpen was indeed there. Alik shuddered at the thought of touching the cage and gestured with his eyes.

“That one there, the black bag. Yes, that’s it.”

The bag looked too heavy for one man to carry, but for Yuder, it was not a problem. He used the power of wind to lift the bag effortlessly, sending it flying towards the door of Alik’s lab, then turned to Mage Hellem to bid farewell.

“I’ll come to visit again next time.”

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Chapter 785

“I’ll come to visit again next time.”

“Farewell then,” was the reply.

Upon receiving Hellem’s farewell and stepping into the adjacent laboratory, Alik immediately rushed to his bag. He eagerly unpacked the meticulously wrapped and stacked suppression device, chattering excitedly.

“Mage Hellem, indeed. Despite our differing fields of study, I fail to understand how she can dismiss this masterpiece as a mere toy. Yet, she seems quite fond of Yuder. Had I gone alone, she surely would have burdened me with more tasks. But her concern for Yuder spared me; that was fortunate.”

‘It’s more about her general kindness than particular fondness for me,’ Yuder thought. She seemed to treat young ones like a benevolent grandmother, but apparently, she was different with her junior mages.

“She must be quite strict with you usually.”

“Hm? No, not really! She gives me lots of work, but she’s not strict. You should have seen how she is with my Master. Absolutely terrifying, no joke.”

That Hellem could be so daunting, especially toward Master Thais Yulman, was hard to imagine.

“Is that so?”

“Huh? You sound skeptical. But it’s true!”

Alik chuckled as he unwrapped the packaging.

“When they first met, Mage Hellem had glanced around the lab and made a pointed remark to my Master about still treating disciples this way… My Master, known for ignoring others’ opinions and doing as he pleases, dared not act that way in front of Mage Hellem.”

It seemed that Alik had developed a deep respect for Hellem since that incident.

“I overheard Master saying once that Mage Hellem used to be quite remarkable… Ah, now it’s all done.”

Alik had finally placed all the suppression devices on the table. Yuder first thought them to be about ten, but surprisingly, the quantity was quite substantial.

“How many have you made?”

“About fifty. It got faster once I got the hang of it.”

Alik proudly displayed and explained his creations.

“Half are in necklace form, the rest bracelets. From my testing, bracelets worn on both hands seem to have a better suppression effect.”

The suppression device, fashioned as accessories, looked remarkably ordinary, hardly resembling restraints. Yuder tested the strength of the completed devices, confirming their durability against significant force.

“They’re sturdy. This should suffice.”

“Right? I think this level of suppression should be enough for those who struggle to manage their powers. However, what the Cavalry currently needs is more of these for people who have committed crimes and need monitoring. So, on my way here, I thought of something…”

Alik shyly suggested adding a special key mechanism to the restraints and reinforcing them with the power of an enhancer. Luckily, there were a few members in the Cavalry with such abilities, making it a good idea.

“Of course, adding locks and keyholes will increase the cost and complicate the process… What do you think, Yuder?”

“As long as it doesn’t take too much time, it seems fine.”

“I’ve already thought through the design. It won’t take long.”

“Understood. I’ll speak to the commander and arrange the necessary support.”

Yuder didn’t even consider the possibility of Kishiar’s refusal. Even if Kishiar had been there, he would have made the same decision.

“Ah! Truly, a commendable decision from the Commander’s assistant. Thank you for your unequivocal support.”

Alik’s face lit up with a beaming smile at the promise of unrestricted research support, and he took a deep breath in anticipation.

“Now comes the most crucial moment. The time to test the prototype’s performance.”

Alik solemnly raised two bracelets, boasting of the enhanced performance of the suppression device he had refined in the capital.

“Would you mind trying these on?”

Both knew that the bracelets would likely not affect Yuder. Nevertheless, this was an opportunity to gauge their improved strength, so Yuder readily accepted the offer.

“Alright.”

As Alik fitted the newly crafted suppression bracelets on his wrists, a sudden sensation of heaviness pervaded his body, as if his naturally flowing power had abruptly solidified.

‘But still… it’s nowhere near the sensation I experienced in Reneve’s domain.’

Yuder clenched and unclenched his fists a few times, then extended his hand and exerted his power into the air. After a brief, trembling resistance, the bracelets shattered with a crack, unable to withstand the pressure.

Simultaneously, a burst of red flames erupted before their eyes.

“Ah…”

Alik gathered the scattered bracelet fragments with a look of disappointment.

“It seems the suppression power has indeed increased significantly.”

“Yes… Though it lasted only a few seconds longer.”

“That few seconds’ difference could be significant for ordinary Awakeners.”

“If someone else had said that, it would have sounded extremely annoying… But coming from you, Yuder, I have no retort.”

Alik joked, then laughed sheepishly.

“Testing these has made me realize how much my abilities have grown. But the more powerful I become, the more I understand how incomprehensible Yuder’s powers are. If my power is like a spring, Yuder’s is like an ocean. It’s no wonder these mere wooden-bracelet-like contraptions struggle to contain it.”

“…”

“So, it’s challenging… but perhaps that challenge is what fuels my passion.”

Alik clenched his fist with a determined, unshaken expression, truly befitting a disciple of Thais Yulman.

To encourage him, Yuder shared information about Reneve.

“You might not have heard, but among the Awakeners who joined us from the south, there’s someone who can create a domain that suppresses the powers of other Awakeners.”

“What? I didn’t hear… Well, I vaguely remember hearing something about an underground mechanism keeping the prison running without suppression device… But it’s a person, not a device?!”

“Yes. A person. The Commander said meeting this individual might greatly aid in your research on improving the suppression device. So wait here, Kanna will be coming to get you soon.”

“Good heavens! I’m already so excited! I should prepare beforehand!”

Alik’s eyes sparkled with excitement. Yuder watched him, bubbling with anticipation, and felt a slight worry that Reneve might be overwhelmed by his enthusiasm.

‘Well… Kanna will guide him, so she’ll handle that.’

“Thanks for telling me, Yuder! I’ll leave the suppression device here; feel free to take as many as you need! I’ll resume making new ones after meeting this Reneve!”

After giving Yuder a hearty hug, Alik hummed a tune and dashed towards a pile of luggage in the corner of the room. Yuder quietly left, allowing him to continue undisturbed, and walked down the corridor.

The corridors of the southern branch had become unmistakably livelier since receiving support from the capital. Yet, this liveliness was not due to chaos, but rather the opposite.

Even though they might be guarded because they were mixed with the successful applicants and the Imperial soldiers, no one shunned others. Following Kishiar’s directive, everyone mingled without reluctance, actively seeking ways to contribute and continuously moving about.

There had been concerns that some might show arrogance or discriminate against the new recruits or Imperial soldiers. It was planned to set an example by reprimanding such behavior through a spar, but such worries proved unnecessary.

‘This atmosphere is probably due to the efforts of Ever and those who had experienced the failure of missing the sage in the capital. They are the most active ones now.’

Those involved in that mission were among the most skilled and highborn in the Cavalry. Seeing such individuals not showing signs of despair but instead working harder, discouraged any laziness among the others.

Yuder observed the busy members for a while before moving on. His next destination was a place marked with an ‘Emergency Medical Unit’ sign.

“You sure arrived quickly, eh?”

As he knocked and entered, the sharp voice of Enon greeted him. Enon was lying half-reclined on a bed, having tossed his small travel bag onto it.

When Yuder glanced at Lusan’s neatly placed bag beside the opposite bed, Enon spoke up with a nonchalant face.

“That kid unpacked and went to meet the other priests who came to help the southern branch. He won’t be back until evening.”

“…”

“Don’t ask why I didn’t go. Just being here is enough to irritate me.”

“I thought you’d be busy treating Elpkins and others.”

“That can wait till tomorrow. But we need to talk today, as you’ll be too busy otherwise.”

Enon grumbled, making a ‘tsk’ sound, and sat up.

“Come and sit. You look like you have a lot to say, so let’s hear it.”

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Chapter 786

“That can wait till tomorrow. But we need to talk today, as you’ll be too busy otherwise.”

Enon grumbled, making a ‘tsk’ sound, and sat up.

“Come and sit. You look like you have a lot to say, so let’s hear it.”

Many were the stories he had thought to tell Enon upon their meeting. Yet, every deed required a sequence.

Yuder deeply inhaled before staring directly into Enon’s eyes and began.

“Enon, there’s something I want to say first.”

“What is it?”

“Even the Commander now knows where I’m from.”

Enon immediately understood the implication. His eyes, half-closed in nonchalance, sharpened as he scrutinized Yuder’s expression.

“Huh, so you’ve finally told him? How much?”

“Almost everything I remember.”

“So, more detailed than what you told me?”

As Yuder nodded slightly, Enon asked in a low voice.

“And his reaction? Did he believe it?”

Ironically, Enon himself had found Yuder’s words hard to believe, yet he seemed poised to storm out if Kishiar didn’t believe them. Yuder, not hiding his faint smile, nodded.

“Yes.”

“Everything? He believed all that madness? Without demanding proof? Didn’t think you were lying?”

“There was none of that. He just… believed. Everything.”

It was surprising but true.

Kishiar had unhesitatingly believed everything Yuder tried to convey and show through the strategy game. In his previous life, nobody had easily believed Yuder’s tales, but Kishiar had listened earnestly. Since then, Kishiar had been acting based on the firm belief that Yuder’s information was true.

Enon’s eyes, which had been scrutinizing Yuder as if trying to see through him, finally relaxed.

“I thought he was no ordinary man from how he acted even when facing me directly… Huh, really. How is that possible?”

“To be honest, I didn’t think he’d believe me either.”

“That’s what I’m saying.”

Enon appeared to be admiring Kishiar genuinely, yet he seemed unable to shake off a certain displeasure. Yuder spoke to him clearly.

“Anyway, that’s how it is. So, I want to start by telling you what I told the Commander. Is that alright?”

Enon was the first entity to whom Yuder revealed his return from the future. He knew how Yuder had disappeared before but not the details. Yuder wanted to start by revealing his past to Enon. If there was one person who needed to know as much as Kishiar, it was him.

“Fine. I’m a bit annoyed to be the second to know, but since that guy was the first to listen and believe, I guess you’re finally ready to talk in detail.”

“Then, I’ll start.”

“…”

“First, you know I came from the future. Precisely, I was a Cavalry Commander before being executed,”

“What, what? Wait!”

Enon suddenly raised his hand to halt the conversation, quickly standing up to lock the door and draw the curtains, ensuring no one could peep in. He paced back and forth, breathing heavily.

“No, what’s with this madness from the very start… Did you speak in such a manner to your Commander as well?”

“At that time…”

“No, never mind. What glory am I even seeking here!”

Enon, having thumped his chest in frustration, sat back down. Grinding his teeth, he spoke in a voice even lower than before.

“Start again.”

“…Should I just answer your questions if it’s uncomfortable?”

“Just start from the beginning with what you were going to say! Do you think I can’t handle it?”

Yuder, eventually yielding to Enon’s insistent demand, began his story anew.

Perhaps due to having repeated it several times to Kishiar, this time it wasn’t as difficult. Yuder calmly detailed how his previous life as Yudrain Aile achieved success and then fell, how the Empire unfolded, and the calamities that befell the world. This account also included newfound information about the people South of the desert in this lifetime.

When Yuder spoke of how he met and parted ways with Enon, the latter remained relatively composed. However, upon hearing how Yudrain killed Kishiar and ultimately met his end as a condemned man in his solitary struggle against the disaster, Enon couldn't suppress his ragged breathing.

"That's all I've told the Commander. I assume he might've guessed some of it, but surely, there must be parts different from the present."

"…"

"Ask if you're curious. If I can, I'll answer."

"Curious about?"

"What you can't believe, or what seems strange."

Enon then hung his head low.

"Ha. You really…"

He seemed at a loss for words, his breath hitching for a long time. Yuder thought he might be angry, but when he looked up again, Enon's face bore an expression he'd never seen before.

He gazed at Yuder with a mix of sadness and a faint, resigned smile.

"…Enon?"

"…It's just like you. To end the story here and then say to ask about anything unbelievable."

"…"

"So that's why you're still struggling through all this hardship here…"

Enon closed his eyes again, exhaling deeply.

"Didn't you want to come back for revenge? You could have rested instead of joining the Cavalry right away. Why didn't you think of that?"

Kishiar had said something similar. Yuder had asked himself the same question. He recalled those moments and spoke.

“At first, I think I did entertain such thoughts.”

“It’s only natural for a human. After all, you’re good at returning favors twice over.”

“But more than that, my heart raced more at the thought of redoing what I had failed.”

Hearing this, Enon clamped his mouth shut, as if struck.

Yuder mulled over his own words. They seemed illogical, yet somehow felt all the more truthful.

It was as if something he hadn’t fully understood himself had suddenly welled up from within. Yuder continued.

“I don’t know the reason. It wasn’t anything grand. Maybe it was just the biggest regret of an unfinished task. It’s the same even now.”

Yes, it wasn’t a grand reason. The mere thought of having another chance to avert the impending disaster filled him with an involuntary joy. Captivated by that thought, nothing else mattered - not revenge, not emptiness. The newfound opportunity overshadowed everything.

“Who asked you to save the world? If nobody believed in you, why go to such lengths?”

“…”

Well, why indeed?

Yuder knew he was not a paragon of virtue. He had used his power for his Commander, for the Empire, for the Cavalry, living without questioning his actions. His sole purpose was what drove and sustained him, and that was no exaggeration.

But then, one day, he found himself facing the people crumbling before the disasters striking all over the Empire.

During moments when he was engrossed in researching ways to predict and avert these disasters, lost in problems with no apparent solutions.

And then, in an almost indescribable sensation, harder even to call instinctual, he felt the onset of destruction amidst those inexplicable disasters.

He was seized by an intense feeling, like a tidal wave crashing over him.

If there was one single purpose for which his power was meant to be used, he was certain this was it.

It was as if a command, etched deep within his heart, had suddenly become clear.

This command, its origin unknown, compelled Yuder to rise and move in a direction entirely different from before…

That voice…

"…Ugh."

Lost in thought, Yuder suddenly furrowed his brow, touching his temple, overwhelmed by a piercing sensation in his head.

'What is this?'

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Chapter 787

‘What is this?’

That voice, what did it mean?

‘Have I ever had such a thought? I don’t recall…’

Yuder, amidst his confusion, furrowed his brow and shook his head. Every attempt to grasp the fleeting sensation resulted in a headache that throbbed like an illusion, accompanied by a faint dizziness that came and went.

Pressing his temples, Yuder tried to hold onto its end, but then,

“Why so troubled?”

Startled back to reality by Enon’s worried voice gripping his shoulder, the strange sensation he was feeling plunged into the depths like a stone in water, disappearing.

“No… Just now, something… I felt like an odd memory I never had was about to surface, but it’s gone now.”

“What was that?”

Yuder bit his lip tightly and removed his hand from his head, where the headache had vanished.

The strange sensation had surged up naturally the moment he heard Enon’s question.

The question about why he had strived so hard when no one had asked him to save the world.

Yes. There was no such person. Obviously not, but… What was that odd thought that had naturally seeped out of his subconscious?

“Did something unspeakable come to your mind? What was it?”

“…No, it wasn’t that.”

Seeing Yuder’s silence as both frustrating and worrying, Enon asked earnestly.

Yuder shook his head and began to describe the strange experience he had just felt. His explanation was rough, given the briefness of the experience and his own difficulty in articulating it, but Enon listened seriously.

“Hmm… Have you felt this before?”

“Not exactly the same, but I’ve had similar experiences occasionally since I returned.”

“What kind of experiences?”

Yuder hesitated before speaking.

“Sometimes, things I didn’t remember… or rather, didn’t even realize I had forgotten, suddenly resurfaced. It felt like… filling a hole I didn’t know was empty.”

“…A hole?”

Yuder had many such holes within him, unknown even to himself. They would sometimes unexpectedly fill, bringing with them forgotten memories and fragments of emotions.

The holes were not just a metaphor. Mick Shuden, who claimed to see the essence of a person’s inner self, once told Yuder, “You have many holes. So many empty spaces that they’re uncountable.”

The frequency of these sensations had decreased recently, but the fact that it happened again while talking to Enon meant it hadn’t completely gone away.

Enon’s brows deepened with concern as he listened to Yuder. This seemed to trouble him more than the stories of the past life. He looked into Yuder’s eyes, scrutinizing him for a long while before finally speaking.

“I can’t fully grasp this ‘hole’ concept. But I have a theory. Your soul was a mess but began to heal, and that seems related to it.”

After saying this, Enon elaborated in a way he had never done before.

“A messed-up soul means two things. One, having suffered wounds or shocks so severe that they damage your very essence. And the other, a weak bond between the body and soul.”

“…”

“Elpkins and others I’ve seen were the former. But you, you’re both. That’s why you’re in worse shape. Understand? I thought things had improved a lot recently, but when I looked again, I saw that the bond was loose again. I don’t know what you did, but…”

“…The bond has loosened?”

“Yes! In your natural state, maintaining sanity and walking straight would be difficult!”

Enon had mostly spoken of Yuder’s soul improving when he had deep connections and contact with Kishiar. Since leaving the capital and arriving here, their relationship had deepened, not lessened, yet Yuder’s condition seemed to have worsened.

‘Why is that?’

Yuder, letting Enon’s ongoing nagging go in one ear and out the other, opened his mouth to speak.

“I understand the first part. But what’s the downside of having a weak bond?”

At this, Enon finally calmed down. Pondering for a moment, he then provided an explanation.

“Hmm… To my non-human eyes, every living being appears as a combination of a physical existence and the energy that forms their essence, their soul. If the bond between these two weakens, it wouldn’t be strange for one of them to scatter at any moment. And if it completely breaks?”

“…Death?”

“Yes.”

His lemon-colored eyes became cold and emotionless.

“A very painful death.”

“But I never felt particularly bad.”

“That’s because you’re an anomaly!”

Yelling out, Enon then sighed.

“From what I’ve observed, you inherently feel less pain than others, and your ability to feel pain seems broken beyond repair. When pain becomes too overwhelming, the mind can erase that part entirely. With soul damage that severe, it’s possible.”

Enon kindly explained that many of the back-alley lives he had seen were like this. Those accustomed to extreme pain from a young age might later perceive that pain as pleasure, or become emotionally castrated, unable to feel it at all.

Yuder felt uneasy considering he might be one of them, but reflecting on his experiences, it didn’t seem surprising.

‘Still, it’s unsettling. If soul damage is such a serious issue, it could suddenly hinder future endeavors…’

As Yuder silently gazed down at himself, Enon ruffled his hair roughly.

“It’s hard to notice since it’s not a visible pain. I don’t expect you to suddenly become cautious and convalesce. But as long as you don’t forget about it, you’ll be fine. Anyway, I’m here with you now, and so is the Commander.”

His voice was brusque, his touch rough, but the warmth felt from them was more comforting than anything. It was so like Enon.

Yuder, with his hair tousled, looked at Enon’s unevenly pursed lips and slightly raised the corners of his own.

“…Understood. Thank you.”

“Ugh, why do I bother with such a dark creature?”

Despite his words, Enon continued to stroke Yuder’s hair a few more times before pulling away.

“But about those holes inside you, did you notice any commonality in what filled them?”

“A commonality?”

“Think about it. You might uncover something unexpected.”

“Well…”

Yuder, lost in thought, suddenly spoke.

“…The Commander?”

“Huh?”

“Now that I think about it, most of them… seemed related to memories and emotions associated with the Commander.”

The moment he spoke, Yuder’s head began to throb slightly, and something he had unconsciously overlooked seemed to shed a thin veil, revealing itself layer by layer.

‘It’s like the dream. Initially, it was the memory of the day I killed Kishiar.’

Why hadn’t he taken this seriously until now? He knew it intellectually, but he had been so focused on the newly surfaced memories and emotions that he had naturally glossed over the rest.

Yuder continued to rub his head in bewilderment, immersed in thought, then suddenly considered that the reason for the weakening of his soul’s bond might be found in these very revelations.

‘If everything I had forgotten is connected to Kishiar, then the most fundamentally shaking event since leaving the capital would be… that.’

“…White gloves.”

Hearing the words slip through his lips, Enon blinked and asked in confusion.

“What gloves? What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

“I had a strange nightmare a few days ago. The Commander from my past life, or rather, just his hands, appeared and tried to touch me, attempting some unidentifiable communication.”

“Only the hands appeared? Ew, what kind of bizarre dream is that?”

Enon recoiled as if the hand from the dream might materialize right there. Yuder briefly explained the dream’s content and then turned his gaze toward the window.

It was precisely the spot where the strange crack had appeared before.

“At first, I thought it was just an unsettling dream. But after talking to the Commander, I realized that the day I had that dream was precisely when the crack appeared in this southern branch.”

“So… that anomaly might be related to the dream?”

“That, and maybe the dream affected the state of my soul, making it worse.”

The dream had been somewhat peculiar. Unlike before, it wasn't reviving forgotten memories, but it felt as if something real had visited in the dream. If a disembodied hand could manifest such clear intent, how was that different from a ghost?

Yuder, after explaining his observations, asked,

"…What do you think?"

"Well… It's hard to say for sure right now, but it seems possible."

Enon didn't dismiss the speculation outright.

"If I could see this crack with my own eyes, things might become clearer…"

"That… I hope not, but it might be possible soon."

"What?"

Enon furrowed his brow in confusion.

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Chapter 788

“What?”

Enon furrowed his brow in confusion.

“It seems the strange crack that appeared in the south this time might not be the last of it.”

Yuder elaborated more on the Southern merchants he had captured, and the speculations he and Kishiar had made after interrogating them.

“When Aton was questioned, he said it’s not over; the incident has already begun. I hope not, but it reminds me of the great Southern earthquake from the past life, or a similar disaster. We’re preparing for the possibility,” he explained.

If the speculation was correct, Enon would eventually witness the crack himself. Not a pleasant thought, indeed.

Listening, Enon sighed as if the mere thought gave him a headache.

“So much has happened. Now, I clearly understand why you called me,” he said.

Yuder expected him to curse the situation, but instead, Enon fell silent. He crossed his arms and stared intently at the table, seemingly lost in thought.

“I’ve heard enough about the current situation. It’s time to organize my thoughts.”

Being with Enon usually meant noisy conversations amidst his shouting. Thus, this silence was a rare moment. Not wanting to disturb Enon’s contemplation, Yuder silently watched him.

Enon usually expressed his emotions intensely, so his smooth, sculpted face, like a carefully crafted porcelain doll, wasn't easily noticeable. Unlike others with striking looks who attracted attention everywhere, Enon's appearance somehow remained less memorable.

'Even the Cavalry members think so.'

They often said Enon was handsome, but nobody delved deeper or showed excessive interest. It was as if they forgot about his looks until his name came up, then remembered him as 'the handsome pharmacist.'

Even when comparing him to Gakane, who often became the center of attention for his looks, or Kishiar, whose presence captivated everyone, Enon's unobtrusiveness was peculiar. Yet, no one seemed to find it strange.

Perhaps his ability to live freely in the 7th Wall District, despite his appearance, without being widely recognized, was the biggest proof that he wasn't human.

Suddenly, Enon lifted his head, as if concluding his thoughts. Noticing Yuder staring at him, he leaned back with a puzzled expression.

"Is there something on my face?"

"No."

"Then why look at me like that?"

"I was just looking. Is there a reason I shouldn't?"

"No, but… it's unusual for you."

Confused and slightly suspicious, Enon rubbed his cheek as if to check for something on his face.

"Anyway, as you said, how this situation in the south is resolved could become a pivotal point affecting the entire Empire and the capital, right?"

Nodding in agreement, Enon continued with a serious expression.

“In truth, under normal circumstances, I should prioritize the capital. That’s the duty given to a guardian who has contracted with Luma to protect the seven walls of the capital.”

After speaking, Enon muttered, “But you know what?”

“Upon reflection, I’ve realized from your story that prioritizing one’s mission above all else may not always be the best approach. It’s a perspective I’ve never considered before.”

Enon’s gaze deepened, as if looking into a distant place.

“Listening to you, it’s clear that ‘the me of the past’ certainly lived by prioritizing my mission. I would never have left the capital, remaining indifferent to the major currents of humanity.”

Yuder knew well how Enon had lived. Originally, he was an inconspicuous pharmacist in the most rundown alley of the Seventh Wall District, rarely showing personal interest in external matters. Even when disasters and political turmoil erupted throughout the Empire, his stance remained unchanged.

Yuder had always found Enon’s knowledge extensive and his generosity towards the wounded remarkable, yet there was something transcendental about him.

That was how Enon had lived his life, prioritizing his mission.

“But even I, who lived that way, eventually left the capital. After my death… I mean, after reabsorption and reformation, I left a message indicating my wish to help you again. It probably means that meeting you changed my mind. In other words, even ‘I’ had acknowledged that you were right.”

Yuder’s heart raced at this revelation.

“Reabsorption and reformation mean…”

“As I said before, if I hadn’t returned after leaving, it would mean death. That’s reabsorption. And not being able to remember upon meeting again, that’s reformation.”

It was a concept difficult to grasp. As Yuder blinked, Enon calmly added, “When the protection of the Seven Walls is in peril or my body faces irrecoverable harm, I can abandon it and return as part of the Seven Walls. From a human perspective, it’s akin to dying.”

“…”

“But it’s not the same as human death. If the Seven Walls regain stability, depending on the circumstances, I can reform and return. However, I would be like a newborn in all aspects, including memory.”

It was an unimaginable explanation, yet Yuder had to admit that Enon’s last letter precisely matched this concept of reabsorption and reformation.

‘Enon must have chosen to leave the capital, believing in my words…’

Back then, Yuder doubted everything and felt that no one believed his words, including Enon. Only after reading Enon’s last letter did he regretfully realize Enon’s sincerity, but it was too late for them to meet again.

Yuder found it hard to fathom Enon’s trust in him, revealed in his last letter, and his heart to mention their reunion despite knowing he could die and leave the capital.

How could he have trusted him so much?

Yuder recalled Enon, who often scolded him upon his frequent injured returns, calling himself “brother.” His chest tightened with emotion.

Yuder reflected on what it might have been like if he had candidly shared his thoughts and objectives with Enon back then, exchanging ideas and assistance. He wondered if anything could have changed if he had been able to talk freely about the disasters and the seeds of destruction he had

witnessed, like now, instead of realizing it only after death. It seemed almost comical to him now.

‘Sigh… I really was foolish.’

Yuder, gazing downward, sighed deeply and then looked at Enon, grateful for the current moment made possible by not repeating the same mistakes.

“I have been thinking… After returning here, perhaps you, in your past life, had foreseen the day I would come back to meet you again.”

“How could that be? I don’t have such abilities.”

“Had you experienced this reabsorption before?”

“A few times. During the period when I was still inept at handling my physical form.”

Enon grumbled about how those past failures had led him to establish his current way of living.

“Do you have any guess where you might have gone after leaving the capital?”

“Well, that’s obvious. Where else but Gyllandr Hill?”

Gyllandr Hill was where the Archmage Ruma had last stayed and a place Enon had previously mentioned he should visit.

“Enon. You haven’t gone there yet, have you?”

“No. I’ve been too busy because of someone.”

“When I return from the south, can I go there with you?”

“With you?”

Enon, seeming surprised, rubbed his chin and then slowly nodded.

“Sure, I suppose it wouldn’t be a problem… Alright.”

“And then, about the hidden page within the First Duke Tain’s journal that I was supposed to receive in the capital. Can I get it now?”

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Chapter 789

“And then, about the hidden page within the First Duke Tain’s journal that I was supposed to receive in the capital. Can I get it now?”

“Ah… Right, that. Yes, I brought it, so just wait a moment.”

Enon rose from his seat and began rummaging through his belongings.

“But in the midst of our busy schedule, will we even have time to examine this?”

“Just before coming to the South, I discovered a relic bearing traces of both the First Duke Tain and the Archmage Luma.”

“What?”

Enon, holding a bundle of papers, turned his head in surprise, letting the papers slip through his fingers.

“Where?! Why are you only telling me this now? Why not in a letter?”

“For security reasons.”

“Still, that’s no excuse!”

Enon, who seemed ready to grab someone by the collar, finally calmed down and extracted the sought-after item from the crumpled papers.

“Take this! And explain quickly!”

Yuder, having received the original journal and papers, began to speak.

“When I visited a small village in the southwest, I discovered monster corpses hidden in an ancient underground cemetery.”

Yuder shared that these were experimental subjects hidden by the First Duke Tain and mentioned a brooch engraved with Luma's symbol, the lemon flower, along with new fragments of the First Duke Tain's journal found there.

"The Commander speculated that Luma might have visited the tomb after its creation, leaving the brooch as a sign of condolence. There was a similar incident in the imperial palace long ago."

"…"

"If you have any insights or knowledge, please share."

Insight or knowledge…"

Enon took a deep breath and pressed his forehead.

"The lemon flower brooch would indeed belong to Luma. He never strayed far when he was with me, so it must have been after he left Gyllandr Hill… Ah."

"…"

"Anyway… My guess is, Luma wouldn't have visited a place out of mere personal sentiment. He must have felt a need to go there, and while there, possibly left the brooch."

"So, you think Luma was looking for something in that relic?"

"Yes, that's my thought."

"But the journal suggests that Luma and the First Duke Tain had a falling out and ceased contact. Could it mean Luma changed his mind afterward?"

"Possibly. Or maybe he learned something new outside that made him curious about his former apprentice's research."

Nothing was certain, but if the only being who could speak of an archmage who lived a millennium ago as if they had met yesterday, says so, it seemed

plausible to at least consider the possibility.

“So, what happened to Luma’s brooch you found? Do you have it?”

Lost in thought, Yuder was questioned by Enon, whose eyes now held a complex expression.

“No. The Commander took it. He intended to send it to Kanna for investigation, but I haven’t been able to confirm it since. With all that’s happened since coming here, it might not have been sent.”

Luckily, since Kanna was currently here, it wouldn’t be difficult to determine the brooch’s whereabouts.

“Right, I see.”

Enon pushed himself off the table and rose to his feet.

“Let’s end the conversation here. If you have more to say, come find me later.”

“To look for the brooch?”

“Not just that, but yes, I’m curious.”

Though he spoke casually, Enon’s strides as he walked away were noticeably hurried and brisk.

“Enon.”

“What.”

The man, about to step out the door, paused and turned his head at Yuder’s call.

“If you want to stay longer, feel free. You don’t need to ask me.”

He seemed to understand that Yuder wanted to quietly remain a bit longer in the medical unit. After a moment of silence, Yuder spoke.

“Thank you for trusting me.”

Enon, hand on the doorknob, raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“What… Why say that all of a sudden?”

“Just something I wanted to say. You can go now.”

“Ha, as if it’s easy to leave after hearing such words! Huh?”

Enon, who had shouted in a burst of emotion, strode back, sighed deeply, and pinched Yuder’s cheeks, stretching them sideways.

“You, listen. Don’t get any wrong ideas, alright?”

“…I wasn’t thinking anything.”

Ignoring the strained articulation of his speech, Enon’s grip tightened as he responded.

“I trusted you because it seemed right to do so. There’s no need to thank me for that. I may not have regretted anything I’ve done in life, but in this case, that’s irrelevant. So don’t you dare think you need to apologize or regret not trusting me before!”

Enon spoke as if he had read Yuder’s thoughts, even though Yuder hadn’t said a word.

“My trust in you now is because you trusted and approached me first. It’s pointless to debate which came first. My decision to stay here and observe the situation, rather than return to the capital, all stems from the same context.”

“…”

“So, if useless thoughts come to mind, just focus on taking care of yourself and eat more. Understand?”

“…”

“Answer me.”

“I understand.”

“Good.”

Finally, Enon released his grip.

“It’s not that I hate being thanked. I trust you understand what I mean. Now, I’ll go.”

Brushing off his hands, Enon turned and left, his departure marked by the sound of the closing door.

Yuder sat alone, quietly watching the closed door.

Despite a lingering pain, his heart felt inexplicably lighter.

-

Time passed swiftly, and it was soon evening, though it felt like nothing significant had happened.

Yuder went to find Kanna, intending to meet Hosanna as planned. He found her in the parlor next to the dining hall, engaged in animated conversation with a group. Upon seeing Yuder, she quickly stood up.

“Yuder! You’re here.”

“I’m about to go meet the person we agreed to see this evening. If you’re busy, I can go alone.”

“No, I was just waiting here, talking a bit. It’s time to leave.”

Kanna bid farewell to the group and moved briskly. Despite being new here, her incredible sociability made it seem as if she had always belonged.

“You seem to have made friends quickly.”

“Yes. Everyone’s so nice and friendly. I didn’t expect so many from the Star of Nagran to be here, but the Commander’s strategy is truly impressive.”

Her words seemed innocent, but there was more to it. While Kanna was naturally sociable, her immediate mingling with many people upon arrival was likely a subtle way of assessing if there were any odd characters in the branch.

But since she spoke highly of everyone’s character, it meant that there was no need to suspect anyone in the southern branch as an enemy.

‘With Kanna here, things are indeed easier in this respect.’

“I heard many interesting stories while talking with them. There’s a lot of news I couldn’t have known just from letters. I would have missed out otherwise.”

“…I thought I had conveyed all the necessary stories.”

Yuder found it slightly puzzling to think there might be stories he’d regret not knowing, but Kanna’s perspective was entirely different.

“No way! You were wearing an incredible outfit when you and the Commander smashed that illegal fighting ring, or how you alone sent hundreds of people flying! Why didn’t you write about that?”

“…”

Yuder had thought the outfit given to him at the fighting ring, designed to mimic ancient clothing, was quite conspicuous, but not to the extent of being termed incredible. He had assumed the lack of comment from the members and Awakeners who saw him then meant it was not a big deal. However, learning that it was still being discussed behind his back was somewhat bewildering.

‘I’ll have to find out who’s been spreading these stories during training later.’

“Oh right. Earlier, I went to the underground prison with Alik and met Reneve as well. She truly has remarkable abilities. But honestly, I was more surprised by the invisible Awakener with her.”

“Why?”

Surprised by her unexpected remark, Yuder asked for clarification. Kanna glanced around before lowering her voice.

“Was her name Cyregina? When she was using her powers, I couldn’t read her at all. It was like she literally became invisible!”

“You mean you couldn’t read her even while in contact?”

“Yes. I tried touching her, of course. It didn’t work.”

Kanna seemed both amazed and slightly wounded in pride. It was the first time her ability had utterly failed to read someone, even when she consciously exerted it.

“Now that I can control my power as needed, I thought things were going well. But now I see a new wall in front of me. Oh dear. The path of training never ends.”

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Chapter 790

“Now that I can control my power as needed, I thought things were going well. But now I see a new wall in front of me. Oh dear. The path of training never ends.”

Indeed, the abilities of Reneve and Cyregina were too valuable to be overlooked. Kanna seemed to think the same.

“I casually asked them, and both expressed a desire to remain in the Cavalry if possible. Cyregina’s punishment, I hear, is likely to be greatly reduced. Until it’s completely resolved, it seems wise to contract them in a general employment capacity with the Cavalry, supporting their livelihood for stability.”

“Mm.”

“I’m thinking of tempting them to come to the capital headquarters while they’re here. It’s just a hunch, but I don’t think they’d refuse.”

For her, who now planned perfect tasks without needing to speak, Yuder promised to devise a new training regimen that she could do alongside her work.

“Wow… really? Ha-ha… Yuder creating a special training regimen just for me… That’s… really nice. Ugh, ugh.”

Kanna let out a pained groan, even as she expressed her joy.

Their conversation continued in low tones until they entered the underground, where it ceased as if on cue.

“Hello, you two. You’re going in, aren’t you?”

Reneve, who they had just been discussing, sat in front of the only entrance to the underground, greeting them. She was comfortably seated in a rocking

chair, knitting with tri-colored yarn, a gift from Cavalry members who felt indebted to her.

The items were plain and unimpressive compared to the luxurious ones in the room where she had stayed in the illegal fighting ring, but Reneve was said to be genuinely delighted with them.

“You seem to have had a hard time, too. Aren’t you tired?”

“Not at all. I can maintain this even in my sleep.”

Reneve shook her head and smiled brightly in response to Kanna’s question.

“I want to help, so don’t worry and go ahead, both of you.”

Yuder nodded silently, passing her and crossing the ‘boundary’.

As he did, the air shifted, perceptible only to Awakeners, and his body suddenly felt heavy. He had entered Reneve’s Awakener ability-suppression area.

The place, once a noble’s mansion, had solemn yet elegant corridors and several closed doors. Inside, those captured in the recent battle were held separately.

Several members, staying underground for surveillance and investigation, recognized them and nodded in greeting. Kanna greeted them first, then led Yuder to a room not far from the entrance.

That was where Hosanna was.

“I’ll be waiting outside, Yuder. After a while, I’ll send a signal and come in.”

Leaving Kanna’s reassuring words behind, Yuder knocked on the door. A thin voice soon invited, “Come in.”

“…”

“Ah… you’ve arrived.”

Hosanna, sitting on the bed, stood up awkwardly to greet him. Despite knowing from Kanna that Yuder would visit that evening, his face was extremely rigid.

His pale, strained complexion hinted at more than mere awkwardness and tension; there was a certain gravitas.

‘After all, we haven’t really seen each other alone since the early days of him waking up.’

Despite this, Hosanna had requested to meet with Yuder. There surely had to be a reason for it.

Yuder quietly moved forward, pulling a chair closer to sit down. It was a position suitably distant yet directly facing the other.

“Traveling all the way here from the capital must have been quite taxing. How do you feel?”

“Why… Why are you suddenly speaking in that manner?”

“Whether I like it or not, since the Cavalry has received assistance from you, it seems only right to start with due courtesy.”

Seeing Yuder attempt to speak with politeness, Hosanna looked startled, as if a rigorous interrogation had begun.

“Please, don’t do that. Just, just speak as you usually do.”

“Well, if that makes you more comfortable.”

Only then did Hosanna heave a sigh, running a hand over his chest.

“So, how do you feel?”

“I’m… I’m alright.”

“Do you think your powers have recovered to any extent?”

“I… I’m not sure. I feel like I’m continually recovering, but powers aren’t something quantifiable…”

Yuder, treating him as a novice Awakener struggling to gauge his own abilities, stretched out all ten fingers.

“Alright. Then, if the farthest distance you could travel before was equivalent to ten fingers, how far do you think you can travel now, in comparison?”

Hosanna, who had been looking fearfully at Yuder’s hand, slowly lifted seven fingers of his own.

“…About this much.”

‘Seventy percent of the original capacity. Whether he can recover further is uncertain, but with proper preparation, he might be able to traverse the continent,’ Yuder thought, nodding without revealing his thoughts.

“Understood. If you notice anything unusual, make sure to tell me. And, I heard you wanted to speak with me.”

“Ah…”

Finally, the heart of the matter. Hosanna took a deep breath, closing his eyes momentarily before lifting his head.

“I presume you already know, but the reason I helped the Cavalry and came here is… I heard there was a serious issue between Nahan and the sage… Is that really true?”

Yuder, noticing that Hosanna no longer referred to the sage with the same ease, began to speak.

“What difference does it make whether I say it’s true or someone else does? You’ll either believe it or not, regardless of who says it.”

Hosanna’s fist, resting on his knee, trembled with tension, but his voice was clear, as if practiced for a long time.

“No. You saved me. So, there is a difference.”

“You remember that?”

“I do. You did something to my body. It was painful… but I know that suddenly, strength surged through me, and I became conscious.”

Hosanna surprisingly remembered the events surrounding him waking from a coma well.

“You could have just left me to die, but you didn’t. There must have been a reason for saving me.”

“…”

“I… I thought maybe you found my powers useful and that’s why you saved me. And now, having regained my abilities, I’ve shown my worth to the Cavalry… So, I guess…”

Just when it seemed he was speaking well, his spirit began to wane once again upon making eye contact with Yuder. Observing this, Yuder leaned back a bit more comfortably in his chair.

“So, you think I valued your abilities highly enough to want to keep you alive, and that makes me more trustworthy than others. In return for proving your usefulness, you want to trade for the truth. Is that what you mean?”

Hosanna nodded faintly.

“Okay. Well, to answer your question as you wish, all the news you’ve heard is true.”

“Ah….”

A sigh of regret unknowingly escaped from Hosanna’s lips, tense with anxiety.

“Then, is Nahan… really still alive? And what about the sage?”

To Yuder’s observation, Hosanna wasn’t asking out of ignorance. He genuinely sought assurance from Yuder.

“As far as we know, Nahan is presumed to have headed south, but his condition is likely not good. The last eyewitnesses who saw him reported severe injuries. The sage, after confronting Nahan in the capital, proceeded south with the aid of Duke Diarca and the Crown Prince. He should arrive soon.”

Hosanna bit his lip so hard it seemed he might draw blood.

“Why has this happened? The sage was a devoted protector… why would he turn against Nahan?”

Yuder hesitated to provide that answer, but if confirmation was needed…

While Hosanna seemed considerably free from the sage’s influence, it was uncertain if he could fully comprehend the following truth. Yet, Yuder looked into his eyes and spoke candidly.

“The sage and Nahan’s goals were likely different from the beginning. Despite maintaining the status quo without a word, the moment they could grasp their true objectives, the truth emerged.”

“…”

“A time like this was bound to come. That much I can assure you.”

In his past life, the Star of Nagran had also faced a division and eventual downfall due to internal strife.

Though Hosanna didn’t fully grasp the underlying meaning of Yuder’s words, he seemed to sense the peculiar certainty in them. Gasping for breath, he bowed his head, clutching his garment, and murmured in a barely audible voice.

“If I… if I further aid the Cavalry… can they save Nahan?”

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Chapter 791

“If I… if I further aid the Cavalry… can they save Nahan?” Hossana asked tentatively.

‘Indeed, this is the crux of the matter,’ Yuder thought, unsurprised. Having assisted the Cavalry and verified the truth, what else could follow but such a plea? However, Yuder did not betray his thoughts and quietly spoke up.

“I fail to grasp your meaning. Do you believe Nahan’s life is in peril?”

Hosanna, trembling yet continuing haltingly, said, “The sage, is merciful, or so I thought… but those around Nahan are different. Those who dislike him will not miss this chance, especially after he directly opposed the sage and even suffered injuries. And if the Cavalry is added to the mix…”

Unable to continue, Hosanna covered his face, bowing his head, his breathing ragged with fear.

“It’s surprising. Even you know of the deep animosity between those following the sage and those loyal to Nahan within the Star of Nagran.”

Even individuals like the brothers Gayle and Doyle, who followed the sage and disliked Nahan, had good relations with Hosanna. Those who knew him generally spoke well of him, so his awareness of this discord was unexpected.

“How could I not know? I have been closer to Nahan than anyone else…”

Hosanna slowly lowered his hands, revealing the fearful and sad eyes of a young man of southern descent.

“In the Star of Nagran, many empathize and align with Nahan, but more do not. Until now, I could confront them, but not anymore. And if the sage’s allegiance shifts… who will mediate then?”

This notion of ‘mediation’ suggested much.

It revealed that Hosanna hadn’t lived in ignorance, but rather, had been making efforts to keep the surrounding atmosphere harmonious at Nahan’s side.

The most dangerous kind in such entanglements is someone like him - innately good, gentle, and kind. But this shouldn’t be mistaken for harmlessness. Hosanna, in his benevolence, would go to great lengths to find ways to favor Nahan.

‘A fragile appearance should not be underestimated…’

Help isn’t only through great physical strength. Sometimes, a single word can sway hearts and lead to mistakes.

Though thinking this, Yuder remained unmoved in posture and expression and continued, “So you’re saying, in your view, Nahan would likely lose if he confronted the sage? Is that a fair assumption?”

“…”

“Then why should the Cavalry intervene in a self-destructive fray, especially to save him? Are you aware of the innocent imperial citizens he’s killed, the buildings destroyed, and the suffering he’s caused?”

“That is…”

The truth was that the Cavalry would benefit from acting first, given the clear risk of their self-destruction and the looming danger of a disaster in the south. Particularly for someone as unpredictable and dangerous as Nahan.

However, unaware of these broader circumstances, Hosanna’s complexion turned deathly pale.

“He argues that Awakeners must be protected unconditionally, while non-Awakeners can be killed without reason. But being Awakeners isn’t innate.

Yesterday's non-Awakeners could suddenly become Awakeners tomorrow in this world."

The truth was, due to the rare occurrence of Awakenings and the newness of this phenomenon, many harbored misconceptions. There were no predetermined Awakeners; conversely, an Awakener could lose their powers at any moment due to a rampage or injury, becoming indistinguishable from a non-Awakener.

"So, whom does he intend to protect and whom to kill?"

"…"

Hosanna bit his lower lip so hard that it bled.

"Moreover, even the Awakener siblings he claimed to protect were left to be captured while he fled. You yourself have been abandoned. And yet, you ask to save him using your power as leverage? Is Nahan more important than your own life? It's preposterous."

Hosanna could not counter Yuder's words. He trembled, his shoulders shaking, and in a tearful voice, he murmured, "I know. The crimes committed by Nahan are… grave. But… he wasn't always like that. He saved many suffering Awakeners, sacrificing himself to protect the Star of Nagran, longing for a safe haven for everyone… His only promise with the sage was just that."

Yuder's attention was caught by the mention of a promise with the sage amidst the incoherent sobs.

'According to Kanna's speculation and reports, the sage's brainwashing ability seems to involve subtly embedding simple commands through speech, likely effective only once per person.'

The command 'trust the sage' was presumably ingrained in most Awakeners under the Star of Nagran. Hosanna's reactions so far suggested he was likely under the same influence.

However, Nahan had been subtly opposing the sage for some time. There had been speculation that even this opposition was orchestrated by the sage, but recent events seemed to disprove that.

A sage with brainwashing abilities wouldn't need to use someone like Nahan as a scapegoat to build trust and loyalty within the group. If he could make everyone believe in him completely, why bother with such tedious methods?

Until Yuder fully understood the sage's powers, he considered the possibility that the sage deliberately set up others to take the fall for him. But knowing the nature of the sage's power now changed things.

If Nahan had been fully brainwashed like the others and deliberately made to be the antagonist, he should have stopped when it was time to fulfill his true purpose.

But what was the reality? Nahan's opposition to the sage had grown more intense and definitive. This indicated that Nahan did not fully trust the sage like the other brainwashed Awakeners, suggesting a different kind of manipulation.

Could the key to understanding this lie in the 'promise' Hosanna mentioned?

"A promise with the sage. What is that about?"

"Just, a promise. The one Nahan made when he first met the sage… before everything started, in the desert…"

Hosanna mumbled incoherently, tears still streaming down his face.

Yuder focused on the part about the conversation they had when they first met.

It was said that the sage's brainwashing was attempted only after lightly fooling those who had just entered the Star of Nagran. However, according

to the information, Nahan met the sage long before the Star of Nagran was properly formed, in its very early stages.

Yuder was convinced that this promise was the key.

“I’d like to hear more about this story.”

Hosanna, with tearful eyes, looked up. Seeing Yuder’s serious expression, he appeared confused yet slowly opened his lips.

“…Is this story important?”

“It might be, or it might not be. Don’t beat around the bush; just tell it. I’ll be the judge of that.”

“…”

Hosanna, who had briefly harbored hope, once again dropped his gaze to the ground. Hesitating, he sighed and began to speak.

“To tell you about that promise… I have to break my promise with Nahan. I promised never to speak of the past to anyone again.”

“So, you’re saying you won’t tell?”

“…No. I will tell. But I hope you won’t reveal to others that you heard this story. It might seem trivial, but for me, and for Nahan…”

Yuder exhaled shortly and raised a hand in a simple gesture, typically used when making a vow.

“Understood. I swear, except for the Commander, this will remain a secret. Is this satisfactory?”

“…Yes. I trust you.”

Hosanna let out a deep sigh, casting his eyes downward.

“Nahan belonged to the nobility of this place.”

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Chapter 792

Hosanna let out a deep sigh, casting his eyes downward.

“Nahan belonged to the nobility of this place.”

Yuder’s eyes briefly narrowed in a twitch before relaxing again.

He felt a slight surprise upon learning that the man who despised nobility and power the most was, in fact, of noble descent - of the Empire’s nobility. But upon reflection, it didn’t seem strange.

‘From the outset, it was clear he was of mixed heritage, with blood from the Southern countries. It’s not uncommon for someone to grow even more hostile towards the group they were originally part of…’

The explanation of his origin seemed to make some of Nahan’s blind hatred understandable.

“You’re not surprised,” Hosanna muttered, looking at Yuder, who showed little reaction to the shocking revelation.

“It’s easier and more intense to hate what you know than what you don’t,” Yuder responded.

“I see. It’s easier to hate what you know… I’ve never heard that before, but it sounds right.”

Hosanna continued softly, as if barely audible.

“It’s not a pleasant story. Nahan was almost imprisoned from birth because his mother was from the Southern countries. And I was just a child hired to care for him.”

“Then, where do you come from?”

“The South. I was an orphan. To survive, I became a courier for traders crossing the desert… and they sold me off, finding it too troublesome to take me back.”

Hosanna smiled bitterly.

“Back then, I barely spoke the language of the Empire. In Nahan’s house, being without relatives and unable to speak the language, I was seen as ideal for secretive tasks.”

‘I can guess what happened.’

It was common for nobles to hire mute servants to hide family scandals. In this case, it seemed they intentionally hired someone from the same ethnic background but effectively mute to conceal a mistress and her child from the South.

“Lord Nahan was truly kind and intelligent, even as a child. Despite the suffocating environment, he never complained and was always gracious to me. I learned the language of the Empire from him… I really admired him.”

Hosanna seemed unaware that his reference to Nahan had shifted to a more respectful form.

While he spoke of admiration, the deep and dark emotion in the eyes of this Southern youth differed significantly from that of others who admired Kishiar, like Nathan Zuckerman. Yuder sensed something familiar in those profound feelings.

“Lord Nahan had a dream. When he became an adult, he wanted to return to his mother’s homeland in the South. I wished to serve him until the end and go with him to the South. But… that plan could never be realized.”

Hosanna clenched his fists on his lap, his eyes filling with pain.

“Since childhood, there was someone who took care of Lord Nahan. We trusted this person because they were always kind to us. But when they

learned of Lord Nahan's plans to leave the house, they didn't hesitate to inform the family."

"How did they find out?"

Hosanna's head drooped, his voice trembling thinly.

"It was my fault… I thought we didn't have much time left, and I felt I had to say goodbye to that person…"

Hosanna's character appeared unchanged from the past to the present.

In fact, bidding a final farewell or informing a close acquaintance isn't inherently foolish. However, in this instance, the other party never intended to honor that confidentiality.

'If that person reported it immediately, his belief that they had a human connection was a misunderstanding. That person was likely planted there to monitor them,' Yuder coldly speculated.

"The escape failed, and we were punished. I thought Lord Nahan would never forgive me for revealing the plan… But he forgave me. He was only curious why that person betrayed us."

Hosanna covered his face with his hands, his shoulders trembling slightly.

"We soon learned the answer. The betrayer was brought to our prison for committing a new crime. They said they were also a bastard of the same house, sent to watch us and seize any opportunity to rise by betraying us."

A betrayer's reward for their deed was usually not advancement, but punishment. A house that carefully concealed its secrets would not have let an ambitious bastard go unchecked.

Hosanna's words confirmed this.

"But they said it would have been better not to try such a thing. They regretted their actions and warned us never to stay with that house. Lord

Nahan could not forgive them, but agreed to another escape attempt, made possible by his newly awakened abilities.”

‘Is this really the story of Nahan? Was he that soft-hearted?’

Trusting the same person twice after being betrayed once was not just naive. Had it been someone close to Yuder, he would have hit him on the back of the head and told him to come to his senses.

Yuder couldn’t imagine Nahan being so forgiving.

‘He’s lucky if forgiveness didn’t drive him mad.’

According to Hosanna, while imprisoned, Nahan awakened his illusionary abilities. They planned to use this for their escape.

The plan was simple. Use the illusion to fake a fire, and escape in the chaos when the guards fled.

“At first, it seemed to work. But before we completely escaped… we realized we were betrayed again.”

Their plan was exposed, again due to the betrayer who had promised to escape with them.

‘Incredible.’

“We were caught… and Lord Nahan… was punished by having half his face burned. Then they left us in a truly burning house.”

The logic was clear: better to erase a scandal as an accident than risk exposure.

“But you survived, so you must have escaped.”

“I awakened my own powers,” Hosanna said, with a low and sad laugh.

“I had been searching for a way to escape, and in that moment, my power emerged. If only… it had come a day earlier.”

Among the Awakeners, some feared and regretted their newfound abilities, wishing to return to their previous selves. But Hosanna's case wasn't unique. Yuder had encountered countless such individuals in his past life.

Typically, those like Hosanna, who spoke similarly, tended to use their abilities without sparing anything. This approach often led to rapid growth in their abilities, but because they did not spare their bodies, many of them had short lifespans.

"…"

"Yet, Lord Nahan… he wanted to save that person. He insisted we couldn't go alone and asked where that person was. But when we found them in the burning place… they were already dead."

The betrayer had paid the price for their deceit twice, receiving punishment instead of reward both times. Their folly was indeed great, and the consequences terribly harsh.

"I dragged Lord Nahan away from there… We must have moved desperately. We wanted to cross the desert to the South, but in our condition, it was impossible. We lost consciousness while fleeing and were barely saved by a passing traveler's kindness."

A passing traveler. Yuder's intuition sparked.

"Was that traveler the sage?"

"Yes."

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Chapter 793

“Was that traveler the sage?”

“Yes.”

Hosanna nodded in affirmation.

“Thanks to the sage and those who followed him, we survived. Lord Nahan’s face and my leg were irreversibly damaged, but still, being alive is a matter to be thankful for.”

Yuder was reminded of Hosanna’s own disability - his inability to use one of his legs properly. It seemed that the injury had occurred during that same time.

“Did your leg suffer the same fate as Nahan’s face, a ‘punishment’ from that same period?”

“Ah… Yes. But it’s nothing compared to what he endured…”

Hosanna sincerely seemed to believe that his leg’s condition was trivial compared to Nahan’s plight. Yuder observed Hosanna, who seemed to hide his leg, nervously gripping the hem of his trousers.

‘They tried to escape using the illusion of fire, and for that, one was branded with the fire’s mark and another crippled leg as punishment. Despite being treated as a disgrace by the family, such harsh punishment was unnecessary.’

The so-called ‘punishments’ were almost akin to torturing a convict deserving death. In fact, they were abandoned in a burning building, not much different.

It’s not something to be proud of for a noble of the Empire to have a mixed-race child with someone from the Southern countries. But it wasn’t a reason

for such extreme treatment. It might have been better for them if Nahan had disappeared into the Southern countries as an adult, without dirtying their hands. Why go to such extremes?

‘Hmm. There must be a reason. Maybe it’s a family that devoutly believes in their religion?’

Yuder kept his thoughts to himself, continuing the conversation naturally.

“So, the promise between the sage and Nahan was made because of the life-saving bond back then?”

“Well, yes and no.”

“What do you mean?”

“Unlike me, Lord Nahan wasn’t initially grateful to the sage. He dismissed it as a pointless act, both towards me and the sage. He refused to go to the Southern country… For months, he showed no will to heal or eat, almost like a living corpse.”

Despite successfully escaping from his family, Nahan’s joy faded. He abandoned eating and refused treatment, wasting away in confinement. Hosanna feared that Nahan wished for death.

“Fortunately, the sage mercifully didn’t cast me aside, allowing me to endure that period. Truly… I’m deeply grateful for that.”

Hosanna said this with a complex expression. He believed the sage showed them genuine mercy, but Yuder had a different view.

‘That person, who even used those who trusted him as human shields, wouldn’t show mercy without a reason.’

Yuder decided to confirm his suspicion.

“Back then, how many followed the sage?”

“Three… no, about four.”

“And how many are still alive?”

“Two… I think.”

“If their number was that small, they must have faced many difficulties. I don’t know if they were used to a life of wandering, but probably they weren’t.”

“Yes… Unlike me, most of them were suddenly awakened and had to leave their homes.”

“Then, in the daily life challenges they faced, you must have been quite helpful.”

“Well, helping with chores like cleaning and preparing meals didn’t seem like a big deal, so I continued to take care of them…”

Hosanna appeared puzzled as to why such a trivial matter was being asked. Yuder simply nodded silently in response.

‘As I thought. Hosanna was being used as a free servant.’

Indeed, tasks like preparing meals and doing laundry for a few people in the outdoors weren’t considered significant. However, this was only true for someone accustomed to such work.

Even Cavalry members, hardened by rigorous survival training, would struggle with fatigue as their period of homelessness prolonged. For a sage, who had never ventured on long travels and was used to a more sophisticated life in the capital, such assistance in mundane tasks would have been unexpectedly vital. To maintain an air of elegance, unseen efforts must be made.

One can only imagine how relieved the sage, weary from the strenuous and dirty life of a wanderer, must have felt upon encountering Hosanna, a young man accustomed to servitude and survival even in harsh deserts.

While it was difficult to gauge exactly, it’s plausible that this comfort was enough to overlook a patient who had lost the will to live, merely lying

there.

It was a crucial but easily overlooked detail, so minute that even the parties involved might not realize its significance.

“So, when exactly did Nahan make a promise with the sage?”

“It seems to have been around the time when Lord Nahan’s facial burns were almost healed, and we needed to decide whether to leave or stay. One day, the sage came to speak deeply with Lord Nahan.”

The sage, it was said, did not make long speeches in front of Nahan, who would not even respond to questions.

“The sage said that there was a burning flame in Lord Nahan’s heart. A flame that could have warmed someone, but remained unused because no one accepted it.”

It was an allegory, almost perfectly mirroring Nahan’s situation. Probably, the sage had crafted these words based on the information naturally extracted from Hosanna. His choice of words, reminiscent of sacred texts, was typical of the sage.

“Did Nahan react to that?”

“At first, he disliked it. He even got angry, wondering if they had investigated our background. But then the sage suggested using that fire to burn something else… that there are many in the world who need such a fire. When he spoke of future tasks, Lord Nahan showed the first sign of response.”

Finally, the sage openly shared with them his past actions and future intentions.

The sage, persecuted for being an Awakener and forced to leave his homeland, and his companions, who followed him for similar reasons. This was similar to Nahan and Hosanna, who had been tortured and abandoned upon their awakening.

The sage expressed his desire to help others like them, providing a safe haven for them to hide and rest. He hoped for their assistance in this endeavor.

Hosanna was quickly moved, but Nahan was different. Nevertheless, the sage offered the proposal with a compassionate face.

“The sage said, we are all brothers and sisters as Awakeners… so please kindly observe what your brother is doing. You can decide later whether to stay or leave…”

What part of these words moved Nahan remains unknown. However, he accepted the proposal for the time being and observed the sage.

“And not long after, there was an incident where Lord Nahan saved someone who was being beaten and left to die by relatives and villagers, just for being an Awakener. Lord Nahan’s abilities were truly a help when we were escaping with that person. Everyone was astonished. And then, that night… Lord Nahan went to see the sage.”

“That day must have been the day of the promise.”

“Yes. Lord Nahan told the sage that he wanted to help as long as the sage’s heart remained true. The sage was overjoyed at this and suggested that to commemorate the day, Lord Nahan should give us all names.”

“The Star of Nagran.”

At Yuder’s murmur, Hosanna nodded with a proud yet nostalgic expression. His eyes grew slightly misty.

“Right. It was Lord Nahan who came up with that name then. It was a name that embodied our goal to eventually depart for our own perfect paradise with other troubled Awakeners. And… it was the day his name was chosen too.”

“His name as well?”

“Originally, he was called by a different name. A name that was hardly ever used, and one Lord Nahan truly detested. So, on that day, he chose ‘Nahan’ as his new name. It signified killing his former self and being reborn.”

He remembered hearing that the word ‘Nahan’ meant revenge. That conversation echoed in my mind.

“…”

“After the name ‘The Star of Nagran’ was decided, the sage made a promise to Lord Nahan. Since Lord Nahan had named it, he asked him to do his utmost for that cause. He said that if we did, we could really go to paradise, together.”

That was their promise.

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Chapter 794

After Hosanna finished speaking, he seemed to become immersed in old memories, sealing his lips in silence. Yuder did not ask another question, making the room instantly wrapped in a sudden quiet.

Then, a gentle knocking sound broke the silence, causing the previously dazed Hosanna to startle back to awareness.

“Yuder, do you think we need more time? I feel it might be time for us to leave.”

Recognizing the knocker as Kanna, Hosanna quickly relaxed, the anxiety in his eyes dissipating. This revealed that he still didn’t fully understand Kanna’s abilities, yet he trusted her greatly, acknowledging her competence in handling matters.

Yuder stood up, dusting off his seat.

“No, we’re done here. We’ll be leaving soon.”

“Uh…”

Hosanna hastily grabbed at Yuder’s garment.

“My request to you…”

Filled with fear and guilt, he couldn’t meet Yuder’s eyes. His grip was so tight that his knuckles whitened. Yuder, after a brief silence, finally spoke.

“My thoughts remain unchanged. However, I’m unsure of the Commander’s opinion and need to investigate further based on your story. We’ll discuss this later.”

Honestly, Yuder expected everyone to share his view, but saw no need to provoke Hosanna unnecessarily with his blunt words.

“Understood.”

Yuder contemplated, looking at the crestfallen Hosanna, who let go of his garment.

Nahan, who had personally verified the survival of Gayle and Doyle in the Cavalry, must have realized that the Cavalry’s policy wasn’t to easily take lives. Thus, he must have surmised Hosanna’s survival, yet he had made no effort to find him.

Even when encountering Cavalry members in the capital, Nahan didn’t inquire about Hosanna’s wellbeing. Given the relationship they had, Nahan’s lack of concern was extraordinary.

Hosanna, having been with Nahan long before becoming an Awakener and even saving his life in critical moments, should have been like a real brother to him. Yet, Nahan didn’t seem to place much importance on Hosanna.

‘I thought they had been together since before Hosanna entered the Star of Nagran, assuming it was merely a long-term master-servant relationship.’

Such unbalanced emotions and relationships - were they all a result of the sage’s brainwashing? Or something else…

Lost in thought, Yuder mused aloud.

“But which prestigious family despised the southern bastard child so much? I don’t recall hearing about that.”

Hosanna hesitated for the first time upon hearing this question.

“It’s…”

“Why?”

“…”

“Is there a problem?”

“…That has nothing to do with my request to you.”

It was the first real resistance he had shown.

‘He refuses to answer just this part?’

Observing Hosanna’s face closely, Yuder pressed again.

“What if it is related? Can’t you answer then?”

Hosanna’s face tightened, beads of sweat forming. He seemed to waver, suppressing pain. His fingers trembled slightly, and his muscles twitched involuntarily.

In a barely perceptible manner, yet growing ever more significant like a bubble about to burst, Hosanna hesitated.

“If that’s the case, I must tell you… I…”

“Wait. I understand. You don’t have to answer,” Yuder interrupted, raising his hand to stop him just as Hosanna struggled to speak. At this, all the subtle reactions stirring within Hosanna ceased abruptly.

Seeing this, Yuder was certain.

“So, you’re unable to answer, aren’t you?”

“…”

“An oath, perhaps?”

“I can’t answer that.”

“Do you know if Nahan is under the same restrictions?”

“I don’t know.”

The responses to both questions differed. Yuder gleaned enough from this alone.

“I see. I’ll not question further on this matter.”

Yuder then left the room. Kanna, who had been waiting outside, glanced quickly inside the room before approaching him.

“Is it over?”

“Yes.”

“What was Hosanna trying to tell you?”

“You probably have guessed it already.”

“Ah. From your tone, it’s about Nahan, isn’t it?”

Kanna easily deduced the correct answer.

“Did he try to persuade you to surrender? Or just ask for mercy?”

“Seems like he hoped for mercy, if possible.”

“That’s asking too much. If we spare Nahan, would he even expect it on his end?”

Kanna smirked, wrinkling her nose. She didn’t wait for Yuder’s response, answering her own question.

“A person like Nahan would rather die than surrender, I bet.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Yuder agreed briefly, eliciting a laugh from Kanna.

“So, what did you tell him?”

Yuder relayed the entire conversation with Hosanna to Kanna. She seemed slightly thrilled to finally learn the past stories they couldn’t uncover during their investigations.

“I’ve learned as much as I can for today. What do you think?”

“Hmm… Sometimes, letting someone speak on their own is better than trying a hundred times with my power,” Kanna noted, slightly frustrated.

“I read information, not thoughts, so it’s hard to be certain about such distant past events… But the information you provided today should make future readings easier.”

After saying this, Kanna lowered her voice and began listing their next steps.

“I’ll try to find out the name of the family Hosanna couldn’t speak of due to his oath. It’ll be my first attempt to break through an oath, so I’m not sure how it’ll go. Probing more into the relationship with Nahan might also reveal answers about the parts you’re suspicious of. And…”

Her counting fingers paused briefly.

“The brainwashing commands applied to Nahan.”

Her gaze sharpened.

“It’s likely the command to ‘do his utmost for the Star of Nagran.’ That explains why he didn’t follow the sage blindly but was still dedicated to the Star of Nagran’s purpose, unlike others.”

Yuder shared her view. The sage must have used such indirect brainwashing because he hadn’t established a proper trust relationship with Nahan at the time.

Back then, the sage would have seen Hosanna as more useful than Nahan. However, Hosanna was Nahan’s servant.

If Nahan had decided to leave the sage’s side, Hosanna would have followed him without question, regardless of the circumstances. This was a certainty, an unbreakable truth, even if Hosanna was in a state of complete brainwashing, fully trusting the sage.

Thus, to prevent the valuable Hosanna from leaving, it was necessary to ensure Nahan couldn’t depart. However, Nahan wasn’t easily swayed by the

sage like others. The sage at that time must have been quite impatient.

‘Especially after realizing Nahan’s abilities were better than expected.’

“Even if it was an indirect method, it must have seemed like a good idea at the time, right? I think making Nahan name the ‘Star of Nagran’ was the beginning of the brainwashing.”

Kanna shared her speculation with the thoughtful Yuder.

“Is that so?”

“Yes. There’s no better way to instill a sense of responsibility than by naming something, right? I know from my experience with pets. The ones I named myself were always more dear and lovable than those I didn’t.”

“…Responsibility.”

Yuder had never considered the link between naming and responsibility.

Chewing over Kanna’s words, Yuder found himself drawn to the notion of naming. He suddenly remembered a man who had given him a name.

‘…’

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Chapter 795

Yuder had never considered the link between naming and responsibility.

Chewing over Kanna's words, Yuder found himself drawn to the notion of naming. He suddenly remembered a man who had given him a name.

'…'

He knew pondering over unsolvable matters was nothing but a waste of time, nothing more, nothing less.

Even if Kishiar La Orr had felt something when he bestowed the name Yudrain, what did it matter?

Still, Yuder couldn't help but ask, despite knowing better.

"…Is it really common?"

"Huh?"

"The act of naming something, does it really evoke a sense of responsibility?"

Kanna, who had been eagerly speculating, looked puzzled by his question.

"Uh… I always thought it was obvious, but now that Yuder mentions it, I'm not so sure… It must be common, right? The sage and I think so, so it must be. Or, is there something strange about it?"

Yuder shook his head.

"No. It's just that I'm wondering if it's a common judgment. I've never had that experience."

"Really?! I thought Yuder lived in a very rural area. Haven't you ever raised livestock? Dogs or cats? Or even named inanimate objects?"

Kanna bombarded him with questions, surprised.

“I’ve raised livestock other than dogs or cats for short periods, but never named them. And objects… Why would I name objects?”

At Yuder’s frown, Kanna chuckled.

“No, you see. Some people give nicknames to their cherished items. In our group, many name their weapons. They choose these names so carefully. Just like Nahan, ‘Star of Paradise.’ You can tell a lot of thought went into it!”

Yuder faintly understood. He knew of people who named their weapons, but he never paid much attention to it.

“Why not try naming your sword to see if it really does bring responsibility and affection? The sword and sheath you carry were both gifts, right? You treasure them.”

Yuder glanced at his sword hanging at his waist. Both the sword and sheath were precious gifts from Kishiar, rare and well-maintained.

But did it show that much to others?

Yuder fiddled with the sword handle, then shook his head.

“No. I don’t think that’s necessary. But I get your point.”

“Ah, I was curious about what kind of names Yuder would come up with. That’s too bad!”

Yuder couldn’t understand why she felt disappointed.

‘Anyway… the conclusion seems to be that it’s common.’

If it was common to feel enough responsibility from naming something to influence behavior, then the man who named him Yudrain might have felt the same.

‘I guess he chose a good word. It turned out to be meaningful… Whether it was whimsical or not, I don’t know.’

Yuder had only recently learned that the name Yudrain was a combination of ancient words, meaning both beginning and end, and in a way, eternity. The strange feeling he had when he first heard its grandiose meaning was unforgettable.

Eternity.

Yuder wondered why the man had chosen such a word. Was there truly an intention behind it?

After their conversation about the act of naming, he became curious about this.

In the midst of these thoughts, Kanna suddenly spoke up as if she had been contemplating the same thing.

“If you think about it, the reason Nahan is so obsessed with the goal of leaving for a world only for the Awakeners may be because of the name the ‘Star of Nagran.’ They say a name carries the wishes of the one who names.”

Yuder’s eyes flickered briefly, but the movement was so subtle that Kanna didn’t notice.

“For example, my mother named me Kanna, hoping I’d grow up strong and beautiful like the Kanna flower. So, Nahan, who named the ‘Star of Nagran’ might have wished more than anyone to reach paradise.”

“…”

“Ah, of course, now his goals and means have completely degenerated into madness!”

After her playful remark, Kanna turned to her silent friend and was startled.

“…Huh? Yuder? What’s wrong?”

Yuder Aile, known for his unchanging expression, looked strangely distorted. The unfamiliar turmoil in his deep black eyes made Kanna wonder if she had said something wrong.

“It’s nothing.”

But the change disappeared as quickly as it had come. Yuder returned to his usual self and quietly gazed at Kanna.

“Let’s end this conversation here. It’s gotten late.”

“Ah… Ah, right! We’re underground, so I lost track of time. Let’s go up and rest!”

Had she seen something wrong? Or had the conversation sparked a different thought in him?

Though worried, Kanna decided not to pry or react uncharacteristically unless Yuder chose to speak about it.

The two quietly left the underground. It seemed as if nothing had happened.

But after parting with Kanna, Yuder’s thoughts on the old name lingered for a long time, a fact known to no one.

-

“…I’ve returned.”

Yuder murmured as he opened the door to the Commander’s temporary office. He still shared accommodations with Kishiar, so this was his only place to return to.

However, Kishiar, whom he expected to find there, was not present. Only the prismatic flames of the magic stone stove, burning fiercely, indicated that Kishiar had recently stepped out.

Yuder sighed deeply and hung his coat on the rack beside the stove. He placed the translated version of Enon’s writings and the book he had carried

on the desk and sat down in his chair. That's when a soreness around his eyes began.

It was a symptom he occasionally experienced when his body was extremely fatigued, ever since he gained the Eye of Magic power.

'It's been a busy day.'

Yet, when Kishiar returned, he needed to report the day's events and address more tasks. It was too early to rest.

'I should look over Enon's translation now. Kishiar reads faster than I do, so he'll finish quickly, but not me…'

Reaching out for the translated document, Yuder found that his hand wasn't moving as swiftly or fluidly as usual. It was unusually sluggish, but not due to fatigue. More precisely, it was a lack of motivation that seemed to be affecting his physical response, despite knowing he needed to see it.

Usually, if there was a task that needed to be done, no matter how tired he was, Yuder would immediately attend to it. Such reluctance was exceedingly rare for him. However, Yuder wasn't particularly surprised by this. During his previous life as a Commander of the Cavalry, he had occasionally experienced similar feelings.

'Back then, I would have turned to alcohol, but now, that's not an option.'

He had realized that the sensation he once thought was intoxication was actually similar to the effects of mild poisoning. Even if someone offered it to him now, he couldn't drink it.

Yuder gazed at the blazing stove, then leaned his head back in the chair and closed his eyes.

The crackling sound seemed to calm his nerves, which had been on edge all day.

If he didn't feel like doing what needed to be done, and there was nothing else he could do, then shutting off his senses and resting like this was the

best option.

He intended to stay like that only until Kishiar returned.

‘…’

But when his consciousness hazily reawakened, Yuder found himself surrounded by scenes from a day long past, unexpectedly unfolding before his eyes.

‘…It’s been a while since this happened. I thought it was an illusion, but to think it’s real is astonishing.’

The somber ash-gray Peletta Castle. The extinguished stove. Kishiar from that day.

Yuder looked down at the sword in his grip, then clenched his teeth tightly.

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Chapter 796

‘…It’s been a while since this happened. I thought it was an illusion, but to think it’s real is astonishing.’

The somber ash-gray Peletta Castle. The extinguished stove. Kishiar from that day.

Yuder looked down at the sword in his grip, then clenched his teeth tightly.

Everything around him seemed to melt into a blur. In the midst of his fragmented and flowing memories, Yuder found himself, almost instinctively, plunging his sword into the heart of that man. A warm liquid, the only source of warmth in this cold and dark place, gushed forth. After a momentary glance at the fallen man, he discarded his sword and turned, heading for the secret passage.

But when he came to his senses, Yuder found himself once again facing that same man.

‘…It’s been a while since this happened. I thought it was an illusion, but to think it’s real is …’

Staring blankly at the man’s face, Yuder raised his sword once more, bringing it down over the man’s smiling visage. Again, everything seemed to end.

And when he emerged from the secret passage into the darkness outside, Yuder found himself once again before Kisiar.

‘…It’s been a while since this happened. I thought it was an illusion, but to think it’s real is …’

He repeated his actions in a frenzy, stabbing over and over.

Yet, no matter what he did, he couldn’t escape the presence of the man, who bore the same smile.

Gasping for breath, Yuder ran through the pitch-black corridors of Peletta Castle’s secret passages.

‘Pant… Pant…’

Strangely, he heard the sound of water splashing beneath his feet, though no water was present. Turning reflexively, he saw crimson footprints in disarray, ending right behind him.

His head throbbed intensely. Ignoring the sticky liquid clinging to and dropping from his shoe soles, he kept running forward, no longer looking back.

Where must he go to escape this place?

Where indeed…

Then, in the midst of the darkness, he collided violently with someone.

‘Ugh…’

Caught off guard, he nearly rebounded, but the other person quickly grasped him, pulling him close. Yuder struggled instinctively, trying to push the other away, but their strength was unexpectedly formidable.

“It’s okay,” whispered a gentle, familiar voice close to his ear.

“It’s okay…”

The repeated whisper sent shivers down his spine. Only then did Yuder cease his struggling. The arms embracing him felt strangely comforting, like a protective barrier.

“Do you recognize me?” asked the voice, once Yuder had calmed down.

He ceased his labored breathing and lifted his head, which had been buried in the other’s chest.

At first, he couldn’t make out the other’s face in the darkness of the passage. But as he blinked, his vision gradually cleared, as if black ink was being washed away.

A sharp jawline. Red lips. Pale, smooth cheeks. Long eyelashes framing glass-like eyes that gazed into his.

And the golden hair, just like the one he had seen fading beneath his sword moments ago.

“!” Yuder stiffened and tried to push him away, but the other grabbed his wrist and brought it to his face.

“Here, feel for yourself.”

The overlapping hands fluttered above the other’s face. This direct approach surely made the other’s presence known to Yuder. Initially, Yuder just let his face be touched, shrinking his fingertips as the other led, but at some point, his hands became free. Yet, he continued to gently caress without realizing.

The man allowed Yuder to touch his face anywhere, obediently bowing his head. When Yuder brushed against the soft eyelashes, they curved beautifully. The plump lips were no different. Strangely, it felt familiar, but the sensation was still too vague to grasp.

Suddenly, a warm breath laced with laughter escaped through the man’s lips. Unable to understand why he laughed, Yuder stopped his hand, prompting the man to speak.

“…Do you remember? I’ve touched you like this before.”

“…”

“Back then, and even now, we’re following the same path. Perhaps this is what it feels like to know who the other person is just by the touch of fingertips.”

At first, Yuder didn’t understand the meaning.

But those words, like the last drop in a full cup of water, slowly awakened Yuder’s blurred consciousness.

Yuder slowly and awkwardly opened and closed his eyes.

Then, he finally gazed straight into the eyes of the man before him.

“…Kishiar.”

Despite his hoarse, almost torn voice, the man smiled gently, softening his brows.

“…Commander?”

“Yes.”

The man overlaid his hand on Yuder’s, which still rested on his cheek, tilting his head.

“It’s me.”

His eyes, filled with tender blurriness, disappeared behind the lowered eyelashes, and his lips pressed firmly onto the palm. Yuder then realized that the drenched blood had somehow vanished completely.

“What’s this? Why am I here… Earlier, it definitely wasn’t… this place…”

“Dreams are like that. You don’t dream because you want to, nor avoid because you don’t.”

Kishiar answered firmly yet gently.

“So, shall we leave now?”

“…But how… Where exactly?”

“Isn’t this Peletta Castle? I guess we just have to go that way.”

The fact that up until now, no matter where he went, he had only encountered Kishiar of ‘that day’, made Yuder agitated. However, Kishiar started walking down the corridor, unfazed, holding Yuder’s hand.

Yuder hesitated but then followed him.

What if, at the end of this, the same scene unfolded again? Would it be another repeat in front of Kishiar?

As Yuder gripped the hand in the pitch-black confusion, Kishiar turned his head.

He spoke as if knowing why Yuder was acting so.

“It’s alright. Whatever awaits us at the end…”

“…”

“I won’t be the one to let go of this hand first.”

In response, the man’s fingers intertwined tightly with Yuder’s. The strength and warmth of the firmly held hand captivated Yuder, making it impossible to pull away.

With each step toward the end of the corridor, the surroundings grew increasingly hazy, but it no longer felt like a dark maw about to swallow him.

Why, he wondered. The answer came surprisingly easily.

This time, it wasn’t just him alone. There were two of them.

“-…”

Yuder softly opened his mouth, inhaled, and opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was the flame of the burning magic stone stove. As he blankly stared at it, a voice came from beside him.

“Did you sleep well?”

“…Commander?”

“Yes.”

The man who had been embracing Yuder from the side pressed his lips to his cheek and lightly rubbed his forehead. His eyes, as if having just woken from a shared sleep, looked languid.

‘…Wait a minute. Why are we like this?’

Yuder blinked and suddenly felt as if he’d been doused with cold water, jolting awake. He quickly sat up and looked around.

“What… What happened? I thought I just closed my eyes for a moment in Peletta… No. In the dream, the Commander…”

“Yes. We were connected in the dream. Just like last time.”

Although Yuder was the one who had the dream, Kishiar responded calmly, as if wondering why Yuder was so surprised.

“When I came back, my lovely assistant was sleeping with such a tired face. I tried to take you to the bedroom, but you wouldn’t wake up easily, and it seemed you weren’t having a pleasant dream.”

“So… What did you do?”

“I wrapped you in a blanket and held you tight, praying fervently for you to sleep well. And then, voila. Suddenly I was there.”

The tone was so light it was hard to believe. But there was no reason for Kishiar to lie in such a situation, so it must be true.

Yuder bit his lip and cautiously asked.

“…So, did you see it this time too?”

“See what? Your dream?”

“…”

“All I saw was you wandering through the underground passages of Peletta Castle. Unlike before, I was glad I could catch you without having to call out several times.”

That meant Kishiar hadn’t seen the scene of himself dying. Yuder exhaled deeply, relieved.

‘That’s fortunate.’

Even if one knows about it through words, seeing such a scene directly is decidedly different. Moreover, this dream… it felt similar yet entirely different, distorted in a new way. It felt less like reviving forgotten memories and more like only glimpsing shattered fragments.

Even now, awake from the dream, all that remained was a faint sensation of seeing Kishiar that day and the dreadful feeling of wandering through the passage. There was no sense of gaining new information or feeling like any gaps had been filled.

“Anyway, I never expected to see the secret passages of Peletta Castle like that. So, it must have been that time in this dream.”

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Chapter 797

Even now, awake from the dream, all that remained was a faint sensation of seeing Kishiar that day and the dreadful feeling of wandering through the passage. There was no sense of gaining new information or feeling like any gaps had been filled.

“Anyway, I never expected to see the secret passages of Peletta Castle like that. So, it must have been that time in this dream.”

Kishiar did not elaborate on when ‘that time’ was. The mere mention was enough. Yuder, too, had no desire to elaborate on witnessing in a dream the moment Kishiar La Orr, from his previous life, was killed by his successor, Yudrain Aile. He merely nodded in agreement.

“Are you feeling alright? Not feeling unwell like before?”

“I am fine.”

Indeed, there was no physical pain. Unlike the times he dreamt of the white gloves, there was no strange reaction or loss of appetite.

Yet, even when he should have risen, Yuder remained still, gazing down at the blanket half-slipped off him.

There was no issue. He was simply reminiscing the last moments of the dream, where a man had tightly held his hand and led the way.

Kishiar’s last words, vowing never to let go first, resonated with him. Even now, Kishiar held Yuder’s hand in the same manner, blurring the lines between dream and reality, stirring an indescribably difficult emotion within him.

He had saved Yuder from the nightmare, without a moment’s hesitation, fully aware of what the dream entailed.

“Yuder?”

Concerned by Yuder’s unusual behavior, Kishiar called out to him. Yuder, avoiding a direct response, cast his eyes down and spoke.

“If you permit… may I stay like this for a bit longer?”

Kishiar’s eyes widened slightly, but he soon smiled.

“Of course, as long as you like.”

He did not question the reason behind Yuder’s sudden request. He simply adjusted the blanket slipping off Yuder’s shoulders, holding him closer to provide more comfort.

For a long time, the two sat closely, looking at the fireplace, enveloped in a tranquil stillness. Yuder suddenly became aware of the familiar scent enveloping him. It was different from the faint body odor he usually sensed up close. This was the scent of a second gender manifestor, intermingling with his will.

The scent, usually well-contained within the owner’s body, now gently caressed Yuder’s entire being. Yuder, responding to it, did not restrain his own scent from mingling similarly.

As their scents flowed and slowly intertwined, Yuder felt an additional sense beyond the usual five, distinctly aware of their movements. The unseen scents carrying intentions, how they enveloped and caressed each other’s bodies - all these sensations were palpable, gradually raising a warmth in his body.

To a non-Awakener onlooker, they might seem motionless and silent, but it was far from it. Their interaction resembled animals comforting each other by grooming, akin to an inaudible conversation.

Despite having spent a busy, energetic day, Yuder felt something dormant within him come alive, breathing life anew.

“Haah…”

It felt like he was finally coming to life. Odd as it sounded, it was true.

Reacting to his breath, Kishiar pulled Yuder closer into his embrace. Yuder turned to meet his gaze.

A pale, expressionless face reflected in the deep, sunken red eyes.

After a moment, Yuder first lifted his head and, as if entranced, pressed his lips against the other's. As their lips slowly met, his tongue slipped between them and gently teased Kishiar's, which had been still. Kishiar, momentarily startled, soon looked down with tenderly curved eyes and wrapped his hands around Yuder's neck, as if to support it. The direction of their inclined heads shifted, deepening their kiss abruptly.

As their tongues intertwined, the sensation of a hand gently caressing through the hair sent a tingling pleasure throughout the body, causing it to shiver. Yet, more delightful was the sensation of being even closer to Kishiar.

Their lips briefly parted, and breath flowed from both without precedence. Their gazes met intensely, yet again no words were exchanged. Then, once more, this time Kishiar initiated, pulling Yuder close and caressing under his lips before continuing into a second kiss.

The deep, lingering kiss, no different from their earlier mingling scents, continued unceasingly. Occasionally, when Yuder gasped for breath, they would briefly part, yet even then, their clasped hands and bodies did not stray from each other.

As the kiss deepened, their bodies gradually tilted until they almost lay across the sofa's armrest, yet neither expressed nor even thought of any discomfort.

In the heat that rose thanks to their mingled scents, Yuder desired nothing but Kishiar La Orr in front of him. And Kishiar felt the same.

"Ah…"

In the midst of the unending kiss, clothes fell away, and bare skin met. The heat below was already more intense than above. Yuder knew his body had softened enough without need for further preparation.

The shame of his body, relaxed and wet with the viscous fluid, did not come to mind. Rather, it was almost pleasing.

“Even if you have to think about tomorrow, you wouldn’t want that, would you?”

A low question came unexpectedly. It wasn’t intended to sober the mood with reason, as before, but seemed more like a confirmation from someone who clearly understood Yuder’s intentions.

Instead of answering, Yuder drew in Kishiar’s lower lip again, biting it gently.

That alone was enough to convey his desire to have the person before him.

He wanted to embrace and engulf him more tightly than ever before.

Only that mattered, nothing else was needed.

Not the coming tomorrow, nor the days after, nor anything else.

Responding to that intense yearning, Kishiar’s eyes clouded over, sweetly and painfully. To him, nothing seemed more tender and lovely in this world than Yuder.

And Yuder now clearly understood that his own reflection in Kishiar’s eyes was not much different.

“Ah…”

Soon, their two bodies completely overlapped. Without a gap, an invisible scent around their nakedness mixed and filled the space, vibrating as one.

Yuder embraced the man with his whole body, as if he would never let go no matter how the world shook, burying his head. The throbbing of their

two hearts, palpable through their touching skin, felt so clear. Even as his head spun with overwhelming emotions and his stomach swelled from taking in the other, he writhed not in pain but in deeper longing. Never before had he felt so alive as he did in this moment.

Knowing there was no deeper way they could connect, yet the thought of wanting it if possible crossed their minds.

Every time Yuder could not contain his emotions and embraced Kishiar tightly, the man responded by pressing his lips to his. So closely entwined that it was difficult to move, yet they continued without stopping.

Unspoken emotions, unable to form into words amidst the uncooled heat, flowed and overflowed for a long time.

“Haah…”

After a long kiss, Yuder parted his swollen, reddened lips to breathe out. The dying light of the fireplace flickered over the half-collapsed sofa.

The man lying in his arms responded by gently brushing his lips below Yuder’s ear. The only things hiding their still-entwined naked bodies were the darkness filling the room and the blanket that initially wrapped around Yuder.

Even after their intimacy subsided, the heat did not fade. And thanks to that warmth, Yuder finally managed to smoothly articulate the thoughts that had been brewing inside him.

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Chapter 798

Even after their intimacy subsided, the heat did not fade. And thanks to that warmth, Yuder finally managed to smoothly articulate the thoughts that had been brewing inside him.

“I met Hosanna earlier, as he wished to see me. He requested Nahan’s salvation. I thought it wise to use this opportunity to learn about their past from him, and finally uncovered the brainwashing Nahan had been subjected to by the sage.”

“What kind of brainwashing was it?”

“To dedicate oneself completely to the Star of Nagran.”

Kishiar did not seem surprised.

“The loyalty to a group and to a person might seem similar, but are ultimately different stories. It appears the sage of that time either failed to understand this distinction, or was so desperate that he thought it was the best course of action, even knowing the difference.”

“Yes. The sage had Nahan name the group before making this request, with Kanna suggesting that the act of naming played a key role in the effectiveness of the brainwashing,” Yuder said, pausing briefly.

“Actually, the idea that merely naming something could engender enough trust to believe the words of someone you don’t fully trust felt quite foreign to me. I’ve never given it much thought before.”

“That’s possible. Have you never named anything?”

“No.”

Kanna had said that the name carries the hopes and intentions of the one who bestows it. That a simple name could embody more than just

responsibility, but deeper emotions.

Perhaps it was this revelation that had so profoundly shaken Yuder, to the point of haunting him through nightmares.

Yuder, feeling Kishiar's breath tickle his neck, slowly began to speak again.

"When I heard that, I thought of the name I was given."

Now, he remembered not his birth name, Yuder, but rather the second name, Yudrain, that first came to mind.

"I wondered if there were also hopes placed in that name. It's strange. I've never been curious about it before."

He had never even sought to understand the full meaning of his name, let alone the intention behind it, until the moment of his death.

This seemingly trivial and unanswerable thought had quietly yet profoundly shaken Yuder. He couldn't explain why he had reacted so strongly, but it was the truth.

"I think that thought might have been the reason I suddenly felt so exhausted and had that nightmare. But I don't think it will happen again."

The one who had named him Yudrain in a previous life was Kishiar in the previous life. Ordinarily, Yuder would have chosen not to speak of this matter to Kishiar.

However, Yuder now understood how much concern Kishiar felt when he was acting strangely, having learned from past experiences. Yuder knew that Kishiar's desperation to connect with his dreams was indicative of a much greater concern than what was apparent. Therefore, he wanted to share this much for the one who had rescued him from that dream.

Indeed, Kishiar's caressing touch ceased momentarily, and a slightly different silence ensued.

Then, the man spoke softly.

“I see.”

“Yes.”

“And now that you’re awake, do you still not wish to know the answer? Are you still not curious?”

Yuder, gazing at the burning fireplace, replied.

“That’s something whose answer will always remain unknown. I think it’s pointless to dwell on it further.”

“So, you still wish to know,” he deduced, picking up on the subtle meaning hidden in Yuder’s silence. The man chuckled as he kissed Yuder’s shoulder, his laughter subsiding into a low voice.

“Believing that mere thought will prevent anything from happening is more a hope than a realistic solution. Sometimes, it’s better to seek even an unclear answer than to suppress and ignore a nagging issue.”

“An unclear answer, you say…”

“Like my thoughts, for example.”

Yuder’s intended response halted abruptly at the man’s unobstructed flow of words.

The man continued, gently stroking Yuder’s stiffened body, “I haven’t named many things in my life, but I always put a lot of thought into it. I agree that naming involves responsibility, various emotions, and wishes.”

Yuder remained speechless. The man who had named him Yudrain was not him, but he was, in essence, Kishiar.

“When I named Nathan, I hoped his future would literally be a blessing. I chose the name from a southern proverb, wishing him to love his roots. And the surname Zuckerman was selected from an extinct knightly family known for producing the bravest knight.”

Kishiar went on with an unasked explanation, citing legends of a knight from that family who single-handedly slew over a hundred monsters.

Then he spoke of the Cavalry.

“Naming the Cavalry was quite a struggle. We had to borrow from existing terms as there was no single word that could instantly describe our powers. I named it to imply a power that was sometimes magical and sometimes like a weapon. Did you know that?”

“I think I’ve heard it every time I introduced the Cavalry to outsiders.”

Kishiar, being the first Commander and founder, obviously named them, but this was the first time Yuder heard him personally mention it.

“But if I were to share a deeper thought, I initially wanted it to mean that the Awakeners are no less than mages or swordmasters and possess a power as great as the combination of both.”

Kishiar revealed that this second meaning was his original intention when naming the Cavalry. However, fearing it would easily provoke opposition due to its audacious spirit, the Emperor suggested softening it to the first meaning. It was an unexpected backstory.

“That seems… more in line with His Majesty the Emperor’s wisdom.”

“Oh, I thought you would understand this spirit,” Kishiar murmured playfully, fiddling with Yuder’s hand. Yuder, letting him fiddle as he pleased, replied, “I agree that the Awakeners possess unmatched power, but if we had promoted the second meaning, we would have been subject to the existing powers’ opposition for decades before accomplishing anything substantial.”

Kishiar’s hand paused for a moment.

“That’s… from experience.”

“Yes.”

Indeed, in his previous life, the Cavalry, while reigning as the continent's supreme force, constantly faced opposition from swordmasters and mages. Had they known the name's original intent, the opposition would have been tenfold.

'Of course, things have changed a lot now. It wouldn't be the same as before.'

Back then, the attitudes of the mage organizations, which had been at odds like archenemies, had transformed remarkably after a series of events in the west. It was hard to believe they were the same groups when observing their current behavior towards the Cavalry. With Kishiar's revelation as a swordmaster, the response of the existing swordmasters was bound to change significantly and much more rapidly than before.

Realizing this, Yuder was surprised to find that he had regained his usual composure enough to contemplate such matters.

Kishiar's words, indeed an 'unclear answer' as he had put it, seemed to have been quite helpful to Yuder in many ways.

The intent behind the name Yudrain, given by the man in the past, remained a mystery. Even during the times when Yuder was trapped in a dream of eternal death, he had thought he would never want to know if such things were eternal.

However, the depth of thought, effort, and affection that Kishiar showed while talking about the names he had given were unmistakably sincere.

What, then, could the word 'eternity' mean to such a man?

Yuder took a deep breath and ventured to ask a question he had thought impossible just moments before.

"Previously, you mentioned that the name Yudrain could be interpreted as 'eternity.' Do you remember?"

"Of course."

Kishiar’s response was slightly delayed, but Yuder did not notice.

“To me, ‘eternity’ feels like a word too far removed to be comprehensible. What are your thoughts on this word, Commander?”

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Chapter 799

“To me, ‘eternity’ feels like a word too far removed to be comprehensible. What are your thoughts on this word, Commander?”

Kishiar, who usually responded promptly to any question, uncharacteristically remained silent. Sensing the quickening of his own heart, Yuder added, “You need not force an answer if it’s difficult for you…”

“It’s not that it’s difficult. Rather, it’s quite simple,” Kishiar finally spoke.

“I remember the emotions I felt when I delved deeper into the meaning of that word while reading ancient texts. To us, living in the present, ‘eternity’ feels like something infinite, without beginning or end. However, people in the era of ancient languages didn’t see it that way. They viewed it as the two ends of a string. Like this.”

Kishiar then showed Yuder something right before his eyes. It was a golden, glittering string from the coat he had cast off earlier.

“When a string exists as one, its ends seem to face opposite directions. But when these two ends meet…” Kishiar brought the ends of the string together, forming not a straight line, but a circle.

“The moment the beginning and the end meet, we can no longer distinguish between the two. They continue in an eternal cycle, together.”

Yuder gazed at the circle formed by the joined string, just as Kishiar had said.

“So, ‘beginning and end’ came to mean ‘eternity’,” he mused.

“Yes. It’s a paradigm shift from the old belief that the end is simply the disappearance of everything. It’s not about being infinite and expanding,

but about being constant and unchanging," Kishiar explained, tying the string into a complete circle.

A circle where the beginning and the end become indistinguishable. One end is the start of the other, and vice versa.

"After realizing this, the meaning of 'eternity' has significantly changed for me. It's no longer a vague goal or ideal, but rather a comfort and a wish."

It wasn't easy to comprehend immediately, but emotionally, he felt he somewhat understood.

Kishiar tightly embraced Yuder, who was deep in thought, and rested his head on him.

"This is purely my current perspective; I can't know for sure what the original creator of the name intended. But, if I were to guess, it might not be too different… Is this too much of an unnecessary story for you?" he wondered.

Through these brief words, Kishiar conveyed much to Yuder.

Even without Yuder's confirmation, Kishiar had already surmised who had coined the name 'Yudrain.' He had given his best in answering Yuder's question.

And he was fully aware and concerned about all the cold and piercing feelings and doubts Yuder held towards Kishiar La Orr from his previous life.

Feeling the strong heartbeat of the man embracing him, Yuder closed his eyes, pondering for a long time before finally speaking.

"No. It was I who asked to hear it. Your response is more than sufficient. Thank you."

A little more strength was added to the man's embrace upon hearing the small gratitude. Yuder, nestled in his arms, turned his gaze to the string, now tied in a round shape and swaying before his eyes.

A cycle where the end is not the end but a new beginning.

Eternity.

As he continued to look at it, he thought that it was somewhat similar to his life, which did not end after he died but came back here and started again from the beginning.

“If that’s the case… perhaps I have truly lived up to my name.”

It was a humorous thought. However, considering that this very notion led him to meet the man he was now sharing warmth with, it didn’t seem too bad.

No, it definitely wasn’t bad.

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Several days had passed since then.

The volunteers from the capital had adapted wonderfully to the south, dedicating themselves to their duties. Thanks to their efforts, the southern region, which had been in chaos due to the death of the Second Prince of Herne and the sudden appearance of monsters, quickly stabilized. People returned to their daily lives as if nothing had happened.

Yuder, too, was no longer plagued by the nightmares of the past, allowing him to devote himself to his work as before.

And now, he stood a step behind Kishiar, welcoming a special visitor to the southern branch.

“Duke, or rather, Commander of the Cavalry. It’s been a long time since we last met.”

“General Gino. You look well, which pleases me.”

General Gino, whom he had not seen in a long time, looked almost unchanged from the last time they met. Even for a swordmaster, known for

their slow aging, it was a remarkable case of youthfulness.

Considering that a swordmaster's aging slows with the accumulation of aura and depth of training, it meant that even at his age, the general had not neglected his practice.

'I wonder how skilled he actually is. I never saw it in my previous life.'

While Yuder observed General Gino with an expressionless face, Kishiar exchanged handshakes and engaged in easy conversation with the general.

"It's nice to see you in your uniform after such a long time. It brings back old memories."

"Well, there aren't many occasions to wear this uniform. But since I'm here, I might as well attend the funeral."

"The death of the Second Prince of Herne was truly a tragedy."

The body of the Second Princess of Herne had been recovered by the First Princess after the examination was completed after the murderer was caught. The funeral was being prepared, but it was uncertain when it would take place as the Duke of Herne had yet to arrive.

"Speaking of which, I heard some delightful news. Is it true, Commander, that you have become the new swordmaster of this nation?"

"Haha. You're asking about that right away? You must have been very curious."

As Kishiar laughed playfully, General Gino nodded seriously.

"Of course. Since me, there hasn't been anyone in this Empire who reached the pinnacle of swordsmanship, and I was deeply saddened by that. You must know better than anyone."

After saying this, General Gino looked at him with intense earnestness.

"So, is it really true?"

Even though the rumors were as good as fact, hearing it confirmed from the person himself was different. He wanted Kishiar to confirm the truth.

Kishiar smiled enigmatically for a moment, then finally nodded emphatically as General Gino became visibly anxious.

“Yes. It’s as you heard. That’s what happened.”

“By God! This is incredible.”

General Gino’s eyes reddened with emotion. He immediately knelt on one knee before Kishiar and bowed his head.

“I sincerely congratulate you. I have always dreamed that when a new swordmaster emerged, it would be you. Now that my dream has come true, this old swordsman has no more regrets.”

Behind the emotionally overwhelmed general, his subordinates, not knowing what to do, also dropped to their knees in a collective gesture.

“Don’t do this, General. I am no longer a Prince, but Duke Peletta and the Commander of the Cavalry. There’s no need for such formalities. Your men seem uncomfortable behind you.”

“Oh, my apologies. I got carried away in my joy, reverting to old habits…”

General Gino then stood up again. Yet, he continued to gaze at Kishiar, his eyes moist, unable to stop smiling.

“Long ago, the time I spent teaching the Young Princes swordsmanship remains one of the most treasured and shining moments of my life. When such a talented individual as yourself chose to no longer wield a sword, it pained me deeply… but it turns out you’ve been practicing all along.”

“Haha. I hope you’re not too upset that I kept it a secret, even from you?”

“Upset? Not at all. Rather, I admire that even during difficult times, you never abandoned the sword. As a fellow swordsman, that’s worthy of respect. Truly… it’s a blessing for the Empire.”

General Gino seemed undisturbed by the fact that Kishiar had kept his status as a swordmaster hidden even from him. Kishiar, smiling, responded.

“To receive such praise from a teacher who was always so strict is overwhelming. But tell me, General.”

“Yes?”

“Have you not heard the rumors that I am not the only swordmaster?”

“What?”

General Gino blinked in surprise.

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Chapter 800

“To receive such praise from a teacher who was always so strict is overwhelming. But tell me, General.”

“Yes?”

“Have you not heard the rumors that I am not the only swordmaster?”

“What?”

General Gino blinked in surprise.

“I thought you would have heard. Rumors claim there’s another swordsman here who can wield the Aura, not just me.”

“Well… I did hear such talk, but naturally, I assumed it was a distortion of the truth…”

General Gino’s skepticism wasn’t unusual. Ordinary people, ignorant of the truth, eagerly believed the rumors of two swordmasters, but those with even a slight knowledge of swordsmanship knew better.

Once, the Empire boasted dozens of swordmasters, but now, scouring the entire continent, one would be hard-pressed to find even ten. This number dwindled further when considering only those actively revealing themselves.

In Yuder’s previous life, the longstanding tradition of the Orr Empire that only a swordmaster could be appointed as General was broken after General Mook and General Gino before him. The Empire had no choice but to fill the ranks with others.

‘Emperor Katchian found it deeply humiliating,’ he reminisced.

Due to the lack of swordmasters, Yuder Aile, the leader of the Cavalry, had to engage in duels, disguised as sparring matches, with renowned swordmasters from abroad to prove the Empire's might.

General Gino, most aware of the shortage of swordmasters, would have questioned his own judgment had he believed the rumors immediately.

"It's not a distortion. It's all true," Kishiar cheerfully revealed the truth to General Gino.

"The protagonist of those rumors is none other than my adjutant, Nathan Zuckerman, standing right beside me."

Nathan Zuckerman, standing behind Kishiar like Yuder, indifferently received the astonished gazes of General Gino and his subordinates, bowing his head. His revealed identity seemed to be of little concern to him.

In fact, as long as it was Kishiar's wish, he appeared utterly indifferent to whether his power became widely known or remained unrecognized.

General Gino, looking at Nathan in disbelief, muttered, "Good heavens… You? Really?"

"…"

"I still vividly remember you as a young servant… To think you became a knight, I assumed it was merely an honorary position, but what exactly happened?"

"Nothing special. It's just Nathan's talent and potential was that exceptional," Kishiar replied, not Nathan.

"Remember, General? When you were teaching me swordsmanship long ago, Nathan was always watching from behind."

"Yes, I remember. You insisted on letting the servant observe and even bet me on it."

“That’s right. Even then, Nathan could perfectly mimic what he saw me practicing.”

Kishiar replied with a mischievous smile.

“It’s just a case of a promising seed growing tall. I’ve always regretted letting such talent go to waste by my side, but now I’m glad to properly introduce him.”

General Gino seemed profoundly moved by these words.

Lost in thought, he gazed at Nathan Zuckerman before nodding gravely and bowing his head in deep respect.

“I had thought the lineage of swordsmanship talent in this Empire had met its fate… but it seems it was merely my aged ministerial eyes blinded by narrow-mindedness. Your presence enlightens me. Even when establishing the Special Forces, I’ve come to realize so much more.”

“Ha, what are you saying with such words?”

“No. If not for your words, didn’t you guess that I would’ve challenged that knight to a duel to prove his aura?”

“Hmm? Were you going to do that?”

Kishiar tilted his head and blinked, a completely natural expression.

To Yuder, it indeed seemed like the general had acted first as he anticipated.

‘Well, there’s no need to request a duel for evidence just to reveal that Nathan Zuckerman is the real swordmaster. That would be an inquisition, not an honorable method.’

“Sir Nathan Zuckerman. It’s truly regrettable and I am sorry that I’ve only recognized your talent now.”

“I don’t think there’s any need for the general to apologize. I’ve learned that a knight’s purpose is not to seek someone’s recognition.”

Nathan Zuckerman's response was concise and neat. General Gino looked at him anew, scanning him up and down several times.

Yet Kishiar, unsatisfied, interjected again.

"General. Among the rumors that reached the south, have you not heard of the hero of the Cavalry? Surely there must be stories."

"…Ah, are you referring to that member who performed greatly in the West?"

General Gino's voice and expression subtly differed from before. Yuder easily guessed that he must have also heard various rumors about himself.

"Yes. Without him, even a swordmaster couldn't have caught the massive monsters raining down like rain so quickly and without harm. He's also a skilled swordsman. Since he's here, how about exchanging greetings? It would be an old acquaintance for the general."

"Ah… Is that so?"

Upon hearing he was an old acquaintance, General Gino blinked and looked around. The office, as usual, was filled with many people.

Yuder, standing near Kishiar, thought the general would immediately spot him, but Gino merely glanced at Yuder and looked away nonchalantly.

"Hmm…"

After scanning faces unfamiliar to him, General Gino's gaze lingered on the members he had met during the Red Stone retrieval mission.

Finally, his gaze stopped on whom he thought most plausible - the dazzling Cavalry's Rose, Gakane Bolunwald, with bright red hair, vibrant green eyes, a kind beauty, and a sturdy physique.

"Is it that person? When I briefly saw him before, I thought he was unusually tall and striking… With such an appearance, in many ways… Ahem. I can understand why there are widespread rumors."

“…Ah…”

“…Ugh!”

Gakane, meeting the General’s gaze, was both embarrassed and the surrounding members quickly turned their heads, biting their lips to suppress laughter.

“That’s not him, General. My assistant is right here; I don’t know where you’re looking.”

“What?”

At Kishiar’s call, General Gino, who had been sharply scrutinizing Gakane, looked flustered. Yuder silently kept to himself as the General belatedly turned his way.

“No, that… young man? To catch a huge monster alone and be so renowned across the capital for an extraordinary appearance that caught the Commander’s eye… I naturally assumed…”

General Gino’s gaze flitted bewilderingly back and forth between Gakane and Yuder. It seemed he had not the slightest inkling that Yuder was the protagonist of the rumors.

“I’m puzzled why you mistook, having heard the correct rumors. Isn’t my assistant the one endowed with sufficient stature and ability to vanquish monsters, not to mention overflowingly beautiful?”

“Ah, of course… That young man also appears tall enough and… well… handsome, I suppose…”

However, calling Yuder Aile ‘overflowingly beautiful’ in front of Gakane and himself was fraught with many problems. Yuder, in an attempt to salvage the situation for the perplexed General Gino, sighed and spoke.

“Please, Commander, cease this jest that puts others in an awkward position.”

“Jest? I’ve never once spoken insincerely about my assistant.”

“If you continue to embarrass the General further, I would have no choice but to leave here for the sake of rectification.”

“That won’t do.”

Kishiar straightened up, smiling radiantly.

General Gino let out a small sigh and gave Yuder a glance filled with slight gratitude.

The conversation that followed flowed smoothly without any personal matters.

General Gino decided to stay at the Charloin Southern Army base, not far from the Cavalry’s southern branch, and promised considerable cooperation with the Cavalry. He seemed to take very seriously the opinion that the strange crack and monsters that appeared earlier might reappear.

Before leaving the branch after the conversation, the General looked alternately at Nathan Zuckerman and Yuder Aile with a significant gaze and left a meaningful farewell.

“I had been contemplating retirement, but seeing such talents makes me realize many things anew. Next time, I shall visit with my Adjutant, who unfortunately could not join us today.”

After everyone, including the General, had left, Yuder, now alone with Kishiar, seized the moment to speak.

“I had no idea General Gino was considering retirement. Maybe that’s why he disappeared in the previous game.”

“That could be.”

“Do you know who the Adjutant he mentioned is? Someone important?”

The fact that he specifically mentioned bringing the Adjutant next time piqued Yuder's curiosity.

"I believe it's Gino's protege and successor. I heard the skills are quite commendable. Rumored to be a future swordmaster, along with the Imperial Knight's commander. Gino has been quite worried about his Adjutant's recent lack of progress in swordsmanship; he might want to bring that person to broaden the horizons."

'Hmm… Gino's protege and successor. Could it be… that person?'

Yuder recalled someone from his previous life who succeeded General Gino as the Southern Army General. A person who became General without being a swordmaster and faced much gossip, seldom visiting the capital and thus having almost no acquaintance but not a good reputation.

The new Southern Army General wasn't fond of the Cavalry, often failing to cooperate in times of need.

'That person wasn't the only one like that, but thinking about the southern earthquake and what followed still irritates me.'

"Could I know the name of this person?"

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Chapter 801

Yuder posed a query, to which Kishiar responded promptly and with ease, revealing the name, “Meghna Kurlieva.”

Yuder’s eyebrows twitched slightly upon hearing the name.

“Based on the naming convention, she is a woman, isn’t she?”

“Yes, indeed. She’s 37 this year, a talent born into the impoverished house of Baron Kurlieva, and one of the South’s prides. Is there something odd about that?”

‘It is odd. In my previous life, the person who succeeded General Gino was male.’

In his former life, General Gino hadn’t died but had instead retired from his position, retaining enough influence to choose his successor.

Yet, it was not one of his well-known disciples or successors who unexpectedly took Gino’s place, but someone else entirely. Instead of this being the hot topic, the focus had been on the fact that this person wasn’t a swordmaster, which was strange.

Yuder cautiously explained this.

“I thought the adjutant was the Southern Army General who succeeded General Gino in the previous game, but I was a bit surprised to see that it wasn’t that person.”

“Really? Who was it?”

“A man, and not a swordmaster, which was quite a topic at the time. He wasn’t very cooperative with the Cavalry Division… His name… I only remember him being called General Balfors.”

Kishiar, recalling the name Balfors, which he had barely remembered due to the man's insignificance, suddenly lifted his head, seemingly recalling something.

"Could it be that person? Galexentre Balfors. He was also Gino's disciple. Not an adjutant, but part of the Southern Army. I briefly saw him when we met in the mountains for the retrieval mission. The only person I can think of fitting that description is him, right?"

Yuder then fully recalled the name from his dim memories.

'Yes, that's him. Such a tongue-twisting name, no wonder I forgot.'

"Yes, that's correct. But you met him? When was that?"

"You wouldn't have seen him. It was just a brief encounter while I was on my way to a strategy game."

During a mission to retrieve Red Stone, Kishiar had left with General Gino to unwind, playing strategy games just the two of them. It made sense that Yuder and the others wouldn't know about this.

"Ah, I see."

"But indeed… hearing this, it does seem strange."

Kishiar, arms crossed, murmured thoughtfully.

"What aspect do you find strange?"

"Gino wouldn't have handled his succession carelessly, especially after devoting over 40 years to the South. He would've been most concerned about this matter. But Galexentre Balfors was rather infamous among Gino's disciples for being problematic. It's not widely known, but those who know, know."

Gino's disciples weren't limited to Meghna and Galexentre. Kishiar and even Emperor Keilusa were, in a broader sense, his disciples.

So, it was puzzling to Kishiar why Galexentre, with his less-than-stellar reputation, was chosen instead of other more suitable disciples.

“Considering he even mentioned bringing his adjutant next time, it seems Gino’s trust in Meghna hasn’t waned… It’s all quite intriguing.”

“We should check if Galexentre has come here this time.”

“That shouldn’t be hard to investigate. There will be many who will tell us without us even asking.”

Kishiar smirked at this thought.

A short while later, the Commander of the Imperial Army’s Special Forces Brigade, Sunz, appeared before them with a bewildered expression.

“Did you have a good meeting with General Gino earlier?”

“Ah… Yes! Thanks to your consideration, all our members could meet and speak with the General comfortably. Thank you.”

Sunz’s expression visibly relaxed. He and the Special Forces members had chosen to stay and work directly with the Southern branch, despite General Gino’s presence.

Kishiar had arranged for them to meet with General Gino separately before he departed, as a gesture of support.

“That’s good to hear. It’s only natural to facilitate such cooperation. The General was very pleased with your unit’s efforts.”

“Ha-ha… Yes. He was very encouraging and did not hesitate to praise us.”

Sunz looked extremely happy at the praise from General Gino, whom he revered. Seizing the moment, Kishiar cleverly steered the conversation.

“Speaking of which, I heard the General plans to bring his adjutant next time. Are you familiar with her?”

“Ah… You mean adjutant Kurlieva! Truly an exceptional person. Frankly, our unit wouldn’t have been able to form so quickly without her.”

“Is that so?”

“She may not be an Awakener, but she was the first to recognize our necessity and potential, treating us without bias. When the idea of forming our unit first came up, it was her who staunchly supported our cause and persuaded others who were against it.”

According to Sunz, Meghna Kurlieva had been safeguarding the South while General Gino was stationed near the Red Stone. After that task was completed, Meghna had been deeply impressed by the stories of the Awakener soldiers she heard from General Gino and had personally met and tested the abilities of Sunz and Emon.

She had then become an unwavering ally, significantly bolstering the Southern Army’s strength.

‘I had no idea such a person was in the Southern Army…’

“Indeed, I’d very much like to meet adjutant Kurlieva myself. What about Galexentre Balfors? He is also a disciple of the General and has shared many meals with you in the mountains, right?”

“Ah… You mean Special Officer Balfors. Yes, he did come this time…”

Sunz’s expression turned ambiguous. Normally a good-natured person, his current demeanor clearly showed his displeasure. It was a stark contrast to when he spoke of Meghna Kurlieva.

Kishiar exchanged a secretive glance with Yuder.

‘It seems he also came. There might be something worth digging into.’

‘Let’s do it together.’

While Sunz was oblivious, the two exchanged glances quickly, maintaining their usual demeanor. Yuder initiated the conversation.

“Was there any incident?”

“Uh… Well, it’s not that, but… It’s a bit difficult to speak freely about someone of a higher rank… It’s a bit… challenging, you know… Ha-ha. I don’t know much about him, either.”

“That’s understandable. I get it.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

Sunz seemed relieved at Kishiar’s kind and dignified nod.

“However, not knowing much about him might actually allow you to provide a more objective perspective. Just between us, it seems the General is quite concerned about those two.”

“General Gino, you mean?”

Sunz seemed more surprised by the mention of the General’s name than the fact that the General was worried about ‘those two.’

Shortly thereafter, it became clear that neither Kishiar nor Yuder were denying the existence of concerning issues between Meghna and Galexentre.

“I, being less familiar with the situation, wanted to hear a balanced view from someone with a neutral perspective on these two,” Kishiar explained.

Sunz’s eyes widened, his expression conveying a sense of ‘Are you asking me?’. Before he could voice his thoughts, Yuder interjected.

“Sunz, you have long interacted with the Cavalry, including myself, and as an Awakener, you are well-placed to understand your fellow comrades, aren’t you?”

“Ah… Yes, that’s right.”

When Yuder casually mentioned the word ‘comrade’, Sunz, surprisingly, seemed to forget the gravity of the situation and was visibly moved.

“So, naturally, I believe you’d understand our curiosity about what their situation is like from the perspective of a fellow Awakener. Don’t worry, the Commander will ask the same question to others, so your account won’t be the only basis for our judgment.”

“Um…”

Sunz scratched his head and, after a moment of contemplation, sighed deeply as if he had made up his mind.

“Alright. But please understand that I really don’t know much, and my perspective is just that of a low-ranking soldier of the Southern Army.”

“Understood.”

Finally, Sunz began to speak about Galexentre Balfors.

“Special Officer Balfors’ dislike for adjutant Kurlieva is well-known among us. I mean, among those of us who served together in the mountains.”

“He’s made his feelings clear, then?”

“Yes. Anyone in the mountains would have heard it at least once. Whenever he drank, he would often say that adjutant Kurlieva, being the favored disciple, avoided tedious duties and lived comfortably in the South. He frequently lamented that the position of the General’s adjutant was originally his. Whether that’s true or not, I can’t say.”

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Chapter 802

“He’s made his feelings clear, then?”

“Yes. Anyone in the mountains would have heard it at least once. Whenever he drank, he would often say that adjutant Kurlieva, being the favored disciple, avoided tedious duties and lived comfortably in the South. He frequently lamented that the position of the General’s adjutant was originally his. Whether that’s true or not, I can’t say.”

The implication of his words was straightforward: Galexentre Balfors harbored deep feelings of inferiority towards Adjutant Meghna Kurlieva, both professionally and as a fellow disciple.

“Then, Adjutant Culrieva must not be fond of Special Officer Balfors?”

“I thought the same, but I never sensed such feelings when I met her personally. More precisely, it seemed that Adjutant Culrieva avoided speaking about Special Officer Balfors altogether…”

“I see.”

After responding, Kishiar thoughtfully rubbed his chin, seemingly lost in thought, then asked another question, as if something had just occurred to him.

“Have those two always had such a relationship? Being disciples of the same master, I would have thought their relationship wasn’t always so strained.”

Yuder sensed an implied meaning in the question, as if it was more than mere curiosity.

‘Is he suggesting there’s more to their relationship?’

Sunz, who seemed to have had a sudden realization, exclaimed in surprise, “Ah… I’m not sure, but now that you mention it, there is a rumor that comes to mind.”

“What is it?”

“Well, just like the previous rumor, this one lacks credibility… but there was talk that Special Officer Balfors was utterly smitten with Adjutant Culrieva in his youth, following her around. Some even said they were truly in a relationship…”

Sunz frowned, as if he disliked even thinking about it.

“I tend to believe it’s just a baseless rumor fueled by curiosity.”

“Understood. Then, what’s your opinion of Special Officer Balfors’ work capabilities?”

Kishiar smoothly changed the subject with a smile, sensing Sunz’ reluctance to discuss the matter further.

Sunz replied with a more relaxed expression, “Although it’s rumored that his swordsmanship is much inferior to Adjutant Culrieva’s, there have been no complaints regarding his work.”

“So, he’s competent in his duties?”

“I’ve been on several scouting missions with him. He was very effective in repelling monsters and detecting any signs of external intrusion. The only issue is that he can be a bit unconventional at times…”

Sunz trailed off, muttering somewhat sheepishly.

“In those times, I found him quite forgiving of minor mistakes or personal issues among us lower-ranking soldiers.”

In essence, Balfors had not hidden his self-indulgent personality, preferring to overlook the slackening discipline of the soldiers during their prolonged garrison duty, which had stretched over a year.

‘At least he was diligent in his duties, that’s a relief.’

After hearing Sunz’ story, Kishiar smiled without judging his embarrassing past but then unexpectedly asked a question.

“That’s interesting. But tell me, was there really a shortage of personnel at the time that required the Southern Army’s Special Officer to join regular scouting missions? To my knowledge, that’s not typically within the scope of a Special Officer’s primary duties.”

In the Imperial Army, there existed a traditional and renowned special unit called the Special Brigades. The high-ranking officers of this unit were referred to as Special Officers.

The Special Brigades were known for gathering exceptionally skilled soldiers in swordsmanship. In the past, it was said that this unit comprised individuals capable of standing against knights who could produce fragments of aura.

In essence, they were a unit of the Imperial Army, each worth a hundred men - a secret weapon of sorts.

“Well, that’s all ancient history now.”

The current Special Brigades had long lost their former glory. As the number of outstanding knights decreased, so did the number of skilled members in the Special Brigades. In a decade or so, Sunz’s Special Forces might even surpass the Special Brigades.

‘Even so, it’s unlikely that someone of a Special Officer’s rank would frequently wander about without substantial duties.’

Yuder nodded in agreement with Kishiar’s observation.

“Yes, such tasks were not typical for a Special Officer. Initially, he hardly ever went on scouting missions, but at some point, perhaps out of boredom, he began joining the scouts during his personal missions.”

“So, he didn’t regularly join the scouts from the beginning but occasionally joined them along the way.”

“Ah, yes. That would be more accurate.”

In short, Balfors had a habit of wandering around and, when bored, would join the scouting soldiers for no particular reason.

“Did Gino allow such a freewheeling attitude?”

“As he significantly contributed to the scouting achievements, the General did not object.”

After the Red Stone fell, the area was frequently targeted by foreign and unknown forces. The Emperor sent the Southern Army there to prevent possible loss of the Red Stone and to protect ordinary citizens of the Empire, but this didn’t necessarily quiet the enemies.

Even when they went to recover it, weren’t there assassins who somehow knew and attacked?

‘Their identities remained unknown until the end.’

As Yuder reminisced, Kishiar continued his questioning.

“Does Balfors’ success in repelling external incursions mean he had good observational skills? Or was he adept at managing soldiers?”

“Uh… the former. He was better at detecting signs of enemy infiltration into the mountains than engaging in direct combat. My ability naturally enhances my night vision, so I often took night shifts in place of my comrades. I frequently saw him patrolling outside for reconnaissance. He seemed to do his job well.”

Suddenly, a subtle smile appeared on the lips of Kishiar.

“Is that so? Well, possessing the ability to see through things, it wouldn’t have been difficult for you to spot someone hiding in the darkness of the night from afar, if you set your mind to it.”

“Haha, yes.”

Afterwards, Kishiar exchanged a few seemingly unimportant words with Sunz before signaling the end of the conversation.

“That will be all for the questions. I think I have heard enough. Thank you for coming on such short notice.”

“It’s no problem. I’m just glad I could be of any help to you, Commander.”

“I assure you, both I and His Majesty the Emperor will not forget your loyalty and assistance.”

Sunz, flustered by such high praise, as he didn’t think his answers were that significant, soon left with a shy yet gratified expression.

After Sunz closed the door and his footsteps faded away, Yuder quietly spoke with an expressionless face.

“Did you discover anything?”

“At first, I just wanted to dig a little into the old relationship between Meghna Kurlieva and Galexentre Balfors. But now, it seems I might have stumbled upon something even bigger.”

Kishiar’s smile remained deep and enigmatic.

“Would you like to sit down? Your legs must be tired.”

“I’m fine…”

“I’m not.”

A short while later, Yuder found himself not sitting across from Kishiar, but rather side by side in close proximity. Mysteriously, a plate of cake was now present on the table, its arrival unnoticed.

“Here, eat while you listen.”

“When did you bring this here?”

“Abilities are for moments like this.”

The response came back nonchalantly, almost shamelessly.

Who would use their ability to manipulate push and pull to secretly bring in a plate of cake? Yuder, astonished by the absurdity but faced with a man who seemed determined not to speak until he took a bite, reluctantly cut a piece of the chocolate cake and put it in his mouth. As he did so, Kishiar began his story with evident enjoyment.

“From what I’ve deduced, there’s a very high possibility that Meghna Kurlieva and Galexentre Balfors shared a deeper, more personal relationship in the past than they do now.”

Yuder’s hand, which was habitually moving to cut the next piece, suddenly froze.

“…Are you saying that the rumor Sunz mentioned is true?”

“Yes. But their relationship isn’t the same now. And Balfors, that man…”

Kishiar placed his hand over Yuder’s halted one, overlapping them, and chuckled softly.

“He’s definitely a spy. I’m absolutely certain.”

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Chapter 803

“From what I’ve deduced, there’s a very high possibility that Meghna Kurlieva and Galexentre Balfors shared a deeper, more personal relationship in the past than they do now.”

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“…Are you saying that the rumor Sunz mentioned is true?”

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Kishiar placed his hand over Yuder’s halted one, overlapping them, and chuckled softly.

“He’s definitely a spy. I’m absolutely certain.”

“A spy? How can you be so sure about that…”

“Shh. Just a moment.”

Kishiar winked, pausing mid-sentence. His long fingers gracefully maneuvered Yuder’s hand. After precisely cutting the cake into a bite-sized piece and bringing it to his lips, Kishiar finally removed his hand.

“Now, there’s no need to be impatient. I’ll continue explaining, don’t worry.”

Yuder began to chew the cake somewhat blandly, and Kishiar continued his explanation.

“Do you remember the mercenaries who died trying to steal the Red Stone during the previous retrieval operation?”

“Yes, I remember. I don’t know who hired them, but they seemed very well-prepared.”

“The client who orchestrated that mission had hired mercenaries who were somewhat fearless due to their Awakener powers, recruited from outside the country. He had enough inside information to easily breach the Southern Army’s blockade around the mountains and send them to where the Red Stone was. Moreover, he took the precaution of making the mercenaries take oaths and even double oaths, showing meticulousness in case they were caught.”

“Yes, even though the discipline of the rank-and-file of the Southern Army was quite lax at that time, the fact that they were able to wait in the mountains for days without being detected is remarkable. At that time, the Emperor and I suspected that the person who commanded them must be someone inside the military, certainly a high-ranking individual.”

“Does that mean… even General Gino was under suspicion?”

At Yuder’s cautious question, Kishiar nodded without hesitation.

“Exactly. Why would General Gino be an exception? At that time, he failed to notice the breach in the Southern Army’s blockade for days, nor could he accurately identify the mercenaries’ traces and the evidence of who was behind them. From the standpoint of trust, it was difficult to be certain whether it was a mere mistake or a betrayal disguised as an error.”

Yuder seemed to perceive a glimpse of the many challenges that Emperor Keilusa and Kishiar must have faced throughout their journey in that statement.

Although the situation warranted suspicion, the name Gino Bodelli was not to be taken lightly. He wasn’t just any Southern Army general; he was a swordmaster respected across the Empire and the entire continent.

It would be risky to show suspicion towards someone who, without seeking any personal gain, had served the Emperor with utter loyalty and been an

exemplary figure to his soldiers. Such a move could potentially alienate one of the few allies the Emperor had.

If a globally revered swordmaster and living legend like General Gino were to express his grievances and turn his back on the imperial family, it would be a welcome opportunity for the four major ducal families and the noble faction, who were hostile to the imperial family.

“So… what happened then?”

Yuder’s eyes sharpened with the question. However, unlike the sharpness in his gaze, the lower part of his face, mechanically continuing to take bites of the cake, lacked his usual coldness.

Kishiar couldn’t help but smile fondly at the scene before him.

“Well, as you can see from the fact that Gino is still fine, our own investigation concluded that Gino Bodelli himself is innocent. However, there’s a strong possibility that someone under him might have betrayed us,” he said.

Kishiar and Emperor Keilusa had surmised that this someone must have been close enough to General Gino to have known about the sudden Red Stone retrieval operation.

Yet, even after informing General Gino of this suspicion and thoroughly searching within the Southern Army, they couldn’t find the traitor.

“Gino took it very hard. He probably even considered retiring because of it.”

“If the traitor was one of the general’s close aides, his retirement would have been the best way to shake them up,” Yuder commented.

“Yes. Anyway, there were two implications for us. First, the traitor who passed information to the mercenaries was skilled enough to deceive even Gino’s eyes. Second, it was too risky to keep such a person within our ranks. So, we…”

Kishiar winked playfully as he continued.

“We began a fundamental restructuring of the Southern Army’s power hierarchy. You know what that means, right?”

Yuder’s mind was suddenly struck by the faces of Sunz and Emon.

“That’s right. That’s why the Special Forces unit was formed.”

If the traitor was indeed among the existing forces, it was better to replace them with a completely new and strong force that was above suspicion.

The previously unknown, lower-ranked soldiers who were talented Awakener soldiers with immense potential were perfect for the role.

“Yes. Your discovery of Awakener soldiers like Sunz and Emon back then was a brilliant move.”

Without that, Kishiar might not have been able to use the Awakener soldiers to overhaul the Southern Army and would have had to seriously consider General Gino’s retirement.

It was an unintended yet effective outcome of revealing the existence of the Awakener soldiers.

“Anyway, I’ve been curious about who could walk among us unnoticed, even evading the eyes of Gino and us… After learning the intricacies of the military’s internal relationships, which are hidden from those at the top, it feels like we’re finally getting a sense of who the culprit might be.”

“Certainly… Being General Gino’s disciple and a Special Officer, Galexentre Balfors would have had easy access to information and freedom of movement. His continuous participation in seemingly unnecessary reconnaissance missions also suggests this.”

“Yes. I suspect his uncanny ability to detect enemy intrusions wasn’t a coincidence. He must have played his cards to remain in that position by earning Gino’s recognition for his abilities, despite not really deserving it.”

“Hmm… His messy personal life but competent work performance could have also diverted General Gino and others’ attention.”

“Yes. Gino is an excellent General and swordsman, but he has a cold side where he shows little interest in those who don’t meet his standards.”

“Do you think he staged the enemy intrusions?”

“After having a casual chat with Sunz and hearing more about what he saw, I think so.”

Kishiar answered with a tone of conviction.

“Suns might not have realized it, but the actions of Galexentre he witnessed, along with several traces, matched remarkably with some suspicious occurrences I had discovered during my previous investigation around the military base’s location,” Kishiar mused.

It seemed that what was initially thought to be a casual end to the story turned out to be far more significant.

“Now, I plan to delve deeper into Balfors’s service records and the events that occurred around that time. Examining how his service record changed around the days we visited there might reveal some interesting results.”

“Adding the Cavalry’s investigation to that could secure irrefutable evidence,” Yuder added.

“Yes, of course, that will be necessary,” Kishiar agreed with a smile.

“By the way, you’ve already finished your piece. Would you like another?”

“I’m fine…”

Before Yuder could even complete his response, he noticed a plate smoothly floating and gliding towards him from behind, as if carried by an unseen force.

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Chapter 804

“By the way, you’ve already finished your piece. Would you like another?”

“I’m fine…”

Before Yuder could even complete his response, he noticed a plate smoothly floating and gliding towards him from behind, as if carried by an unseen force.

With the plate already set before him, Yuder sighed softly and spoke up.

“…It feels a bit odd eating alone. Wouldn’t it be proper for the Commander to join me?”

At this, the glint in Kishiar’s eyes sparkled strangely with joy, a reaction quite opposite to what Yuder had anticipated.

“Is that an invitation? I would be delighted.”

“…”

Kishiar really did cheerfully bring a new fork. Watching him, Yuder suddenly realized something.

‘Come to think of it, have I ever made such an offer before?’

In their relationship, it was almost always Kishiar who made such casual offers. Whether it was for walks or meals, it was mostly him. The only time Yuder had offered food was when he had simply cooked some fish and berries Kishiar had caught and picked during a spontaneous retreat to the cabin.

‘That was hardly an invitation.’

Yuder realized anew that, apart from his intense feelings for Kishiar, he had never really seen him as someone to whom he could comfortably make offers. Despite their differing status and rank, he knew it wasn't common in a relationship as close and intertwined as theirs. This was in stark contrast to his interactions with his Cavalry comrades, with whom he had often exchanged small favors.

Even then, it had never been Yuder initiating the offers, but he had always seen it as natural to reciprocate in some way, such as planning a new training schedule, without feeling burdened by it.

From his perspective, these were all natural actions, but he wondered if Kishiar might have felt differently, causing a slight ache in his heart.

'I shouldn't have refrained from such gestures just because I never did in a past life.'

Thinking of making offers to Kishiar La Orr made him first recall memories and feelings of rejection. Perhaps that was the biggest reason he had only ever accepted Kishiar's offers until now.

But the Kishiar in front of him now was overjoyed at the mere suggestion of sharing the cake.

"Why do you look so? There's still plenty prepared. Don't worry, I won't eat too much."

Yuder's thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the man's naturally surprised expression.

"I wasn't staring because I'm hungry… But why do you keep offering this all of a sudden?"

"Hellem came to nag me."

Kishiar answered with a small laugh.

"She said you seemed thinner than when you were in the capital. What is the Lord doing, she asked. She's right. Now that I think about it, we haven't

had proper time together because of various events. I deeply regret that.”

“What are you talking about…”

As Yuder expressed his astonishment, Kishiar let out a deep sigh and caressed one cheek.

“And it’s not just Hellem. Our very temperamental pharmacist, scolded me when he came looking for the Archmage’s brooch; Kanna Wand, Ever Beck, even the reserved Gakane Bolunwald and the timid mage Alik said similar things in their reports. Would you believe that?”

“No… I’m a grown adult capable of taking care of my own meals. I’ve eaten enough, and there hasn’t been any significant change in my body, so why…”

“I know everyone says that because they know my assistant speaks so harshly to himself,” Kishiar said with a smile, cutting off Yuder’s speech.

“It’s natural to worry and be concerned as much as one cherishes and loves.”

“…”

“And I do too.”

Yuder looked down at his hand, awkwardly holding a fork, and let out a long breath. He felt he could never win against this man.

How could he refuse when Kishiar spoke so earnestly, making it embarrassing and awkward to deny him?

“Very well. Bring as much as you like. I’ll eat it all.”

At this resolute response, Kishiar burst into laughter. Yuder did not understand why he was laughing so heartily, but he found the sight of his laughter pleasing after a long time.

Afterward, Kishiar drew towards Yuder five different types of slice cakes and various pastries all at once, explaining the major clue that led him to firmly believe that Galexentre was indeed a spy.

“You might have guessed, but it was largely thanks to the previous game’s story. When I looked back at the worst choices and answers that could have occurred in the current situation, based on what happened then, I began to see new information that could have been missed.”

“So where did Galexentre Balfors try to pass the Red Stone?”

“It definitely wasn’t one of the four major ducal houses.”

Kishiar replied thoughtfully.

“They might have been curious about the Red Stone, but not desperate enough to obtain it, nor did they find it particularly appealing. From their perspective at the time, it would have been more beneficial if His Majesty the Emperor recovered and brought it to the capital without them lifting a finger.”

They would have been willing to lend a hand if it meant embarrassing Kishiar and the Cavalry, but as far as the Red Stone was concerned, there was no reason for the four major ducal houses to take such a risk. Yuder agreed with this.

“That makes sense. Then it must be a foreign country.”

“Specifically, I believe it’s from the south.”

It was a statement affirming the identity of the enemy, still shrouded in mystery despite two lifetimes of experience.

“Many of the phenomena observed by Sunz overlapped significantly with the traditional signaling system used in the south, utilizing natural features. It’s not used for military purposes, but perhaps they thought it useful enough to teach to an imperial like Galexentre for communication.”

“How did you know such a thing? Did you also investigate that?”

“It wasn’t because of this incident; I already knew.”

“How so?”

“When Nathan and I wanted to play secret tricks as children, we needed our own codes that even the smart people in the palace couldn’t easily decipher.”

Kishiar’s lips curled up slightly.

“Back then, I thought it was cool and fun. Using hand signals from traditional games of other countries that others ignored, or implicit signals unknown in the Empire, to sneak out of the palace and play.”

Thanks to this, Kishiar was able to quickly identify a candidate during his conversation with Sunz. Maybe those childhood antics were useful in some way, Kishiar mused with a smile.

There seemed to be a glimpse of the mischievous prince’s character from his youth in that smile.

Yuder found himself lost in thought, gazing down at the five empty plates.

‘So… it’s the south again.’

Was Galexentre Balfors from his previous life also a spy from the south? Did he use their methods to push aside his rival Meghna and seize the position of General in the south?

“I can’t be certain, but when you think about it, that alliance wasn’t such a bad outcome for either Balfors or the South. Balfors gained a General’s position he never could have attained normally, and for the South, it meant more freedom of action in the southern territories.”

The Southern countries had long been meddling with the imperial south. Consequently, the imperial south had become a region where many Southerners resided, and it was also the place with the most Southern half-bloods. Even the original base of the recently captured Aton and Southern merchants was in the south.

Although General Balfors from the previous life had not been on good terms with the Cavalry and had been slow to respond to the great calamity in the south, he had been diligent in one aspect.

That was during the time Emperor Katchian decided to engage with the Southern countries, and Balfors was responsible for gathering and conveying the Southern countries' perspectives.

Being in a position to represent the Emperor's will, yet well-informed about the Southern countries, and being the least politically problematic figure, he was naturally seen as the ideal choice for the role of the General of the South. And indeed, he had performed that task quite diligently.

Considering that the beginning of the Southern countries' interactions with various countries north of the desert started with its exchange with the Orr Empire, it was a significant achievement.

"Furthermore… they were as quick as us to realize the usefulness of the Awakener's abilities. There might not be a direct organization like the Cavalry, but who knows how many more capable Awakeners like Aton and his subordinates exist."

There had always been countries covertly vying for the Red Stone. However, the meticulousness and preparedness shown by the Southern countries over the years were on a different level compared to those nations.

The determination of those people, which he hadn't considered too important in his previous life, now came to him with a chilling clarity.

Yuder looked down at the last empty plate and spoke.

"It seems there's one more thing to ask Aton about."

-

Not long after, a new visitor arrived.

It was Lady Myra, the First Princess of Herne, bringing news of the official funeral of Second Prince Ashrav. She was dressed in a funeral-appropriate

black attire with a short veil and placed a letter directly on Kishiar's desk.

The letter, encased in a black envelope adorned with a white leaf, was a traditional noble's funeral invitation, signifying the importance of inviting esteemed guests to the deceased's final journey.

"It's been a while, Your Grace, Duke Peletta. I hope you've been well."

"Of course. But you, Lady Myra, look rather tired. Are you alright?"

"I wish I could say I am, but sadly, that's not the case."

Lady Myra's lips curled faintly behind her veil.

"While it's one thing that my father finally arrived, the situation became quite noisy with the arrival of an uninvited guest."

"An uninvited guest?"

"It's the youngest son of the Diarca family."

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Chapter 805

“While it’s one thing that my father finally arrived, the situation became quite noisy with the arrival of an uninvited guest.”

“An uninvited guest?”

“It’s the youngest son of the Diarca family.”

‘What? Kiolle?’

He had heard that Kiolle was coming to represent the Diarca family and the Imperial Knights. However, who could have predicted his name would appear here, alongside Duke Herne?

‘I was wondering why there was no news of his arrival… What’s going on?’

Like Yuder, Kishiar also seemed intrigued by this sudden turn of events, his eyes narrowing in curiosity.

“Hmm, the youngest prince of Diarca, you say? I know him well. It’s quite interesting that he has come with Duke Herne. How did that happen?”

“I heard they met by chance on the way to Charloin. His original lodging was arranged by the Imperial Knights, but once my father learned of this, he felt it beneath our Herne dignity to let him stay there, so he offered our own accommodations.”

So, the idea of a member of the four great ducal families staying in lodgings provided by mere knights was distasteful to Duke Herne, who held a status akin to a ruler of the south.

“The problem is the prince of Diarca didn’t seem too pleased with the arrangement. But what choice did he have, once my father intervened? We’re dealing with the aftermath of his decision.”

“Even though he insisted on a different lodging, he continues to stay as a guest?”

“Yes. My father has given strict orders.”

With that, Myra let out a sigh.

“My father often acts unpredictably. It might be about maintaining the face of Herne, but I sometimes wonder if he suspects some other motive from the Diarca family.”

“Really? Why do you think so?”

“The prince of Diarca and his servants sometimes act quite suspiciously,” Myra’s lips twisted even more than before.

“It’s hard to pinpoint, but they certainly seem strange. Yet, in some ways, their words and actions might be deliberately misleading, as if to hide their true intentions… It wouldn’t be surprising if my father accompanied him out of suspicion.”

‘Hmm…’

Yuder picked up on several things from Myra’s words.

First, Duke Herne didn’t consider that his hospitality might be unwelcome.

That even the stubborn and foolish Kiolle had to succumb and be dragged here as a ‘guest’, and that the bold and decisive Myra had to bow her head in front of her father.

Lastly, he seemed quite adept at politics under the guise of fickleness.

‘The fact that Kiolle is up to something strange… that’s nothing new.’

After all, it’s Kiolle da Diarca. Since he’d be attending the Second Prince’s funeral, he’d soon find out the reason. Yuder had no worries regarding Kiolle.

‘Anyway, I’ve never had a clear idea of what kind of person Duke Herne is since he’s never shown his presence… I should gather as much information as possible now that I have the chance.’

While Yuder was lost in thought, Kishiar smiled calmly and offered comfort to Myra, saying, “Oh my, you’ve had quite the trouble.”

“So, has Duke Herne’s health improved considerably? I’m concerned that he might be in poor health, especially with his child’s funeral approaching and the grief it brings.”

“Yes. As you said, his grief is profound. So much so that he spent an entire day collapsed in his chamber, with a constant stream of beautiful women tending to him. I was quite worried about any unseemly happenings that might be observed from outside.”

Though their conversation seemed exceedingly polite on the surface, neither Kishiar nor Myra spoke with genuine sincerity. From Myra’s elegantly veiled sharp tone, Yuder could vividly sense how much she resented her father’s behavior.

‘Anyone would feel the same if their father, upon the death of a sibling, preferred the company of women in his chamber and left others to handle the aftermath.’

After discussing a few simple matters related to current issues in Charloin, which Myra’s party and the Cavalry were jointly handling, Kishiar extended his hand first, exchanging a light farewell with Myra.

“Despite your busy schedule, I am truly grateful that the Lady herself has taken the time to personally deliver this news. I shall certainly attend, accompanied by my assistant.”

“You flatter me. As the one who so brilliantly uncovered the unjust death of my brother, you undoubtedly deserve to be there more than anyone. I believe my brother would have been deeply grateful if you were to visit. Please do come and witness Ashrav’s final journey.”

After saying this, Myra placed her hand on her chest, preparing to bow gracefully, but suddenly staggered as if dizzy.

“Ah…”

Despite her maintained composure, her fatigue was evident, impossible to conceal even behind her veil. She seemed to have suffered more than ordinarily.

Seeing this, Kishiar gently stroked his chin and signaled to Yuder with a glance.

“It seems she might collapse if she were to leave just like this. Assistant, could you arrange for the Lady to visit the medical unit before she departs?”

“Understood.”

“No, I am fine, really…”

“Don’t refuse. If the Lady’s health were to deteriorate, it would become our concern. The skill of our pharmacists and priests from the capital is extraordinary, so you need not doubt their expertise.”

Myra seemed to think it was an exaggeration but sighed and expressed her gratitude.

“Then… very well. Thank you for your consideration.”

Yuder supported Myra and stepped outside with her. As they walked, he summoned a gentle breeze to cool the sweat on her forehead, causing Myra to look around in surprise.

“What’s this? A breeze indoors?”

“I summoned it. My apologies for not informing you in advance. If it was unpleasant, I apologize.”

“No… No, it was actually quite refreshing.”

Myra looked at Yuder with a mix of relief and wonder. In her eyes, Yuder recognized a familiar curiosity, one he had often encountered in his previous life. He decided to open the conversation.

“Do you have any questions about my power?”

“Was it that obvious?”

Myra’s face flushed slightly.

“I heard that manipulating the wind is quite difficult, even among mages, so I was surprised at how easily you did it. Is it difficult to control your abilities?”

Compared to the many impolite questions he had received, this one seemed genuinely innocent and even endearing. Yuder shook his head in response.

“Using this power is as natural to me as moving my arms and legs. I have never found it difficult.”

“That’s remarkable… I heard you could manipulate the forces of nature, is that so?”

“Yes.”

Myra asked a few more questions. During their conversation, several members passed by, greeting them. Among them was Kanna, who was escorting someone shrouded in a robe.

‘Hmm… The covered figure, could it be Hosanna?’

As they drew closer, indeed, the robed figure revealed red-skinned hands and a limping leg. It was Hosanna.

“Hello, Lady Myra. Yuder, hello to you too.”

“Right.”

Myra nodded silently, acknowledging Kanna's greeting. Hosanna, who was lightly grasped by Kanna's arm, seemed frightened, hunching his shoulders and almost hiding behind Kanna.

"Why are you out here?"

"I was feeling a bit claustrophobic working underground, so I came out for a walk. The weather's nice today, isn't it? We'll be heading back soon. See you later."

Kanna, realizing Myra might not fully understand but ensuring Yuder could, succinctly explained their reason for being outside before cheerfully disappearing. Their appearance hardly suggested someone taking a prisoner for a walk.

As they neared the medical unit, Myra finally spoke.

"That was a face I haven't seen before. Was that member from the capital?"

"Yes. That's Kanna Wand, a Deputy Commander of the Cavalry."

"She looked about my age and seemed fragile, yet impressive."

"An Awakener's abilities are not limited to physical strength. And the standard for fragility is relative, just like with Kanna. She is one of our members with the strongest abilities and willpower."

"…"

Myra fell silent, lost in thought. Yuder wondered if he had been too blunt, but her voice, when she spoke again, was softer.

"You're right. I've always disliked when people judged me as fragile based on appearances, yet here I was doing the same to someone else. I appreciate you making me realize my mistake."

"It's not…"

“Whether an Awakener or not, one shouldn’t judge based on appearances alone. You’re correct.”

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Chapter 806

“Whether an Awakener or not, one shouldn’t judge based on appearances alone. You’re correct.”

Myra did not show any anger. It was a feat in itself to maintain such composure in a situation where anyone else, especially in a state of poor health, would have become easily irritable.

It was, in a way, a quality befitting a great leader.

‘Yet, in her previous life, she remained unnoticed in a corner of the Imperial Palace, her very existence forgotten by all.’

Yuder reminisced about the Myra from his past memories, now so faint and distant.

Even if there was no love between her and Katchian, a mutually respectful relationship at the level of a typical noble couple would have allowed her to display these qualities. Even if not as a Duchess, perhaps she could have achieved greater things.

‘Well, but considering Myra as an individual, it’s better this way, isn’t it?’

Thinking so, Yuder knocked and pushed open the door of the medical unit.

“Sir Yuder? What brings you here?”

“What’s up? Why are you here? I’m swamped.”

Lusan and Enon, as always, were there. The only difference now was two other guests who had arrived earlier.

“Uhmm…”

Or should it be said, one more creature or person, uncertain which, was also there.

The early visitors to the medical unit were Pruelle and Revlin, holding the cat Nipolen. They greeted Yuder with a happy expression, but were startled to see Myra, dressed in black, following him.

“I’m not here for myself. Princess Myra of Herne who is visiting the Commander is feeling unwell, so I brought her here. Could she be seen immediately?”

“Now? But this cat hasn’t finished its check-up yet.”

Enon, responding indifferently, looked towards Myra. Even behind her black veil, his piercing yellow eyes seemed to see through everything, causing Myra to be momentarily disconcerted. Immediately, anxious voices erupted around them.

“No, if Lady Myra of Herne is unwell, we must give way. Our Nippy’s issue isn’t urgent, so please go ahead, Pharmacist.”

“Yes, I think that’s best too!”

Pruelle and Revlin said, causing Enon to squint his eyes in surprise.

“What? You guys were clinging to my robe, insisting I finish with your brother first. Why this sudden change?”

“…It was the desperation of not knowing Nippy had overeaten. I never thought this picky eater would take so much from others. But now that we know it’s not serious.”

Pruelle answered seriously, but Yuder noticed his slightly slower voice and the faint blush on his ears.

‘He’s embarrassed, it seems.’

Taking advantage of a relaxed Pruelle, Nipolen sprang away.

“Oops, Nippy!”

The small cat, who recognized and was particularly comfortable with Awakeners, especially Yuder, slipped past Myra and rubbed against Yuder’s leg, his way of greeting. Understanding this, Yuder, as usual, quietly nodded in response.

“Hello there.”

The cat was then caught by his brother. Pruelle, looking sheepish, apologized.

“Sorry… or rather, my bad. Your pants are now covered in fur. Is that okay?”

“It’s fine.”

Dirtier things than fur had clung to him before; this was nothing in comparison.

“Nippy, please stop startling my heart like this. I’ve lost count of how many times you’ve frightened me today.”

As Pruelle sighed, Enon stood up, having made a decision.

“Well, in that case, I’ll start with the others first. They do seem to be on the verge of collapsing. Little one, you come along too.”

“Yes.”

Lusan nonchalantly accepted the nickname and approached. Myra, still in a state of surprise, found herself seated between the pharmacist and the Priest.

“I appreciate the consideration, but I’m fine. There’s no need to see me early. I don’t wish to take away the time of those who came before me.”

“Too bad you didn’t say that earlier. I hate having to reverse decisions once they’re made. Let’s just get this over with.”

Enon retorted with a grimace, giving Myra a once-over. She was taken aback again by his rude tone and the peculiar atmosphere that somehow made it difficult to argue.

Regardless of her shock, Enon and Lusan asked her questions with the same demeanor they would use with the members of the Cavalry.

“Lady, did you get enough sleep last night?”

“Because of work… I only fell asleep just before dawn and woke up soon after sunrise.”

“And the day before?”

“That was similar too.”

“That’s too little sleep. Have you had any chest pains or headaches?”

“I often have headaches, so it wasn’t unusually worse. Though, I did have some chest pain before going to bed tonight…”

“Hmm.”

After finishing all the questions, Enon drew his conclusion.

“It seems you were born with limited vitality and have been overextending yourself. What do you think?”

“Yes, I have the same impression.”

“The best thing is to eat well, sleep well, and rest, but in my experience, those who need to hear that don’t come to us in the first place.”

Yuder felt as if Enon was glaring at him as he said this.

“I’ll give you some medicine. Take one here and continue with the rest for about a week. And after the little one here gives you some light, you should feel better.”

“Lady, please excuse me for a moment.”

While Enon went to prepare the medicine, Lusan seamlessly infused Myra with divine power. Amazed by the immense divine power emanating from the young Priest, Myra was taken aback.

“Are you a high-ranking Priest from some diocese?”

“Ha, hardly. I’m just an ordinary Priest assigned to the Cavalry.”

Despite using so much divine power, Lusan didn’t seem out of breath, just relaxed. Color quickly returned to Myra’s pale face. As soon as Lusan stepped back, she exhaled deeply and exclaimed in admiration.

“That’s truly remarkable. I’ve felt the divine power of many priests, but never anything like this. It felt like being embraced in the arms of an angel.”

“Oh, you flatter me too much.”

Lusan blushed, fumbling with embarrassment, but couldn’t hide his pleased smile.

“Ah, you’re definitely better now. Here is the medicine.”

Enon returned and handed Myra the medicine. She hesitated slightly upon seeing the container filled with white pills.

“What are these made of?”

“Kukulip root, Alabacho leaves, and a bit of honey.”

“All ingredients beneficial for vitality restoration. Kukulip is a particularly rare herb to find naturally…”

Seeing Myra’s immediate recognition of the ingredients, Enon looked surprised.

“Hmm. Most nobles don’t bother with the names of herbs.”

“My respected sister is fond of growing herbs. That’s why I studied them. Anyone can learn if they study.”

“That’s true. It’s just that no one bothers to do it.”

Enon’s attitude visibly softened. Yuder surmised that this ‘respected sister’ must be the Empress.

‘I knew that Myra was one of the Empress’ contacts in the Herne family, but they seem closer than I had anticipated.’

Without hesitation, Myra popped one of Enon’s pills into her mouth, swallowed it, and then stood up to offer her thanks.

“Thank you. Duke Peletta mentioned that the Cavalry’s medical unit possesses skills rarely seen elsewhere, and indeed, their reputation is well-deserved. I also extend my gratitude to the two of you for giving up your time for me.”

“Oh, no, it’s nothing.”

Revlin, who had been watching Lady Myra El Herne with wide, sparkling eyes of fascination, shook his head in surprise at being directly addressed. But Myra’s words did not end there.

“Excuse me for asking, but I’ve been curious since earlier… is the cat being held by that person over there actually a human?”

“…”

A bold question prompted a moment of silence in the medical unit.

“I thought about why you referred to it as your brother, and that was the only explanation I could come up with. If my question is too forward, I apologize. It’s just that I can’t help being curious.”

After a brief pause, Pruelle nodded with a smile.

“Yes, that’s right. This is my brother. Originally a human, he has the ability to transform into a cat.”

“That’s remarkable. I’d like to greet him, but it might be difficult since we’ve just met. Thank you for answering my question.”

“No, it’s I who should say that. You’re the first to realize that upon first sight. Usually, no one pays attention whether I call the cat my brother or anything else.”

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Chapter 807

“No, it’s I who should say that. You’re the first to realize that upon first sight. Usually, no one pays attention whether I call the cat my brother or anything else.”

“Is that so? I thought it wouldn’t be unusual for someone in the Cavalry to possess such a talent.”

“That may be true, but it’s another matter entirely to actually think that way.”

After saying this, Pruelle chuckled and rose from his seat.

“The truth is, I’ve longed to meet this young friend here, Revlin, and the Lady for some time. I never expected to meet you in such a place, but I am delighted to have been of help and to have shared a conversation, albeit briefly.”

“Me? Why…..”

Myra, who was puzzled, suddenly seemed to realize something as she alternated her gaze between Pruelle and Revlin. A spark of recognition flickered in her eyes.

“Now that I think of it, Revlin… Yes, I remember hearing that name. Could you be the third son of the Apeto family, Revlin Shan Apeto, who temporarily joined the Cavalry?”

“That’s right. That’s me.”

Revlin replied with a joyful expression. Myra’s eyes then moved to Pruelle’s red hair.

“Then you are…”

“I am currently living here under the name Elle.”

Myra quickly nodded without mentioning the name of another ducal house.

“I never imagined I’d meet people I’ve only heard rumors about here.”

“We are now official members of the Cavalry, here to offer our support.”

The conversation that followed wasn’t lengthy, but the atmosphere was unbelievably congenial. The three of them, belonging to the four great ducal houses but existing outside their traditional hierarchies, shared similar temperaments, so it wasn’t odd that they got along so well.

Indeed, for a first meeting, they seemed to mesh remarkably well.

Yuder watched the trio, reminiscing about the past.

In his previous life, these individuals were unaware of each other’s existence. But now they had met in a manner that didn’t seem at all unfortunate. Though their reasons for opposing their families were different, their intentions converged on a similar path.

Being on a difficult journey, realizing one is not alone in their position can be empowering. Perhaps they could even offer each other unique support.

After leaving the medical unit, Yuder accompanied Myra to her carriage. Her expression was far more relaxed compared to her arrival.

“Thank you for today. Your assistance was invaluable.”

It was a generous compliment for merely guiding her to the medical unit, as Kishiar had instructed.

“Every time I come here, I feel the freedom and greatness of the Cavalry, but today, that spirit of freedom seemed to influence me too. I feel more alive and clear-headed than I have in days.”

“I’m sure the Commander would be pleased to hear that.”

Despite Yuder’s stark response, Myra smiled pleasantly.

“I regret not having more time to talk with the people I met at the end. Well, there will be other opportunities. After the funeral, I’ll officially become the heir to Herne, and then I’ll be able to do even more.”

With these words, Myra left, looking rejuvenated.

As Yuder watched the carriage depart, he was about to turn away when someone nearby called his name.

“Yuder!”

“Ever?”

Ever, who had been tasked with pursuing the Sage as soon as she arrived in the south and had rarely been attached to the branch office, was there. Beside her were the Eldore siblings, and all three of them, having just returned, were covered in dust.

“What brings you here?”

“I was seeing off a guest who had visited the Commander. Where have the three of you been?”

“We went in search of the Sage, of course!”

“The information given secretly by the successful candidates of this branch was excellent! We learned a lot!”

The reply came from the Eldore siblings. Hinn and Finn smiled broadly, their eyes gleaming like pleased little beasts.

“We’re off to report to the Commander now! Yuder, will you join us?”

How could he refuse?

“Alright.”

Without delay, they headed to where Kishiar was. Kishiar, seeing Yuder, after sending Myra off, returning with Ever, Hinn, and Finn, smiled without surprise.

“Did Lady Myra return safely? Was she in good health?”

“Yes. She recovered after receiving divine power and medicine and went back. According to Enon, she’s naturally frail and had been overexerting herself.”

“Not surprising, coming from the Herne family.”

Were there many short-lived members in the Herne Ducal House?

After mentioning with a composed face that he should send Lady Myra some restorative medicine, Kishiar turned his gaze to Ever.

“Now, Ever. Have there been any developments in the task you were assigned? I hope you bring good news.”

Ever’s gaze hardened.

“Yes. With the help of many here at this branch, I’ve gathered information about the Sage and tracked the movements of the Star of Nagran’s southern base. We concluded that the Sage arrived safely at the base recently, but for some reason, left again.”

“Hmm.”

“Please look at this first.”

Ever carefully drew out a map of the south. It wasn’t detailed like a military map, but that wasn’t the important part.

On the map, a bright red ink line traced a route.

Starting from the north of the south, passing through several cities to the desert, then moving towards the coast before the line broke off.

And in the desert, a large circle was marked. Ever explained.

“The circled area in the desert is where we believe their base to be. They use their abilities to completely hide the place from people’s minds, so even those who were part of it find it difficult to pinpoint its current location.”

It was not just hidden from sight, but from the mind as well, unless you were the hider or a few specific people. It was difficult even to think of or remember the place from outside. The method of entry was similarly convoluted; it was easy to leave but hard to re-enter, according to testimonies from former inhabitants of the Star of Nagran.

“They are particularly adept at concealing their bases, as we’ve seen in the west.”

“Yes. But while finding the exact location of the base is difficult, the method of entering and leaving it hasn’t completely changed. The Sage and Diemon seem to have used this route to reach it.”

Of course, tracking them down was not as easy as it sounded. The Empire’s land was vast, and finding those determined to hide and move stealthily was a very difficult task.

Thus, Ever reported that she had tracked based on Diemon’s appearance rather than the Sage’s.

“The Sage is clever at concealing himself, but Diemon is noticeably conspicuous. We were able to trace their path thanks to the traces he left in people’s memories at various places.”

“We helped Ever! Devran too! Devran couldn’t come with us as he’s still gathering information!”

The Eldore siblings interjected as if they had been waiting to say this. It seemed that Devran’s absence was due to this reason.

Kishiar nodded and focused on the last part of the path drawn on the map.

“Good. This is where they were last seen, moving northeast from the base. If we continue this line straight from there…”

Kishiar’s finger traced the end of the Sage’s last known path. Extending the line in the same direction, it ended at Charloin.

‘As expected.’

Previously, Kishiar and Yuder had predicted that the Sage would come to the south, specifically targeting the Cavalry and Kishiar.

The cunning Sage would have to target Kishiar to preserve his own life and curry favor with Duke Diarca. To do so, he would have to come to where they were.

‘Besides, this southern region is where the Star of Nagran’s southern base is. Anyone would think it’s a natural choice to reinforce there before coming here.’

But did things go as planned?

It was hardly an exaggeration to say that most of those who should have guarded Star of Nagran’s southern base were now absent. It wasn’t hard to imagine what the Sage would have found upon his arrival.

‘Thinking he’d find a stronghold, only to discover it in ruins must have shocked him.’

The Sage, trusting only his own followers who remained at the base, would have gone there. But the more capable fighters among his loyal brainwashed were now all locked up in the underground of the Cavalry’s southern branch.

‘The Sage. He must have been seething with frustration and shedding tears on his way here.’

Yet, there was no sympathy. A normal person might give up and run away to save themselves at that point, but the Sage, even in a disadvantageous situation, was trying to get to Charloin by any means necessary.

It meant the Sage's ambition was enormous and persistent.

There was no mercy to be shown to such a man.

"Considering the last sighting, the Sage might already be in Charloin."

"Yes. Thinking so, we returned here first. From now on, we plan to continue tracking in and around Charloin, but I think everyone should be cautious."

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Chapter 808

“Considering the last sighting, the sage might already be in Charloin.”

“Yes. Thinking so, we returned here first. From now on, we plan to continue tracking in and around Charloin, but I think everyone should be cautious. We never know when or how he might appear.”

The sage had spent nearly two years in this southern region. Although he had hidden himself away at the base, but there might have been more accomplices extending their reach everywhere.

Yuder agreed with Ever’s judgment. Kishiar also nodded lightly before folding the map.

The next question he asked was not about the sage.

“Nahan, too, I presume, must have come here around the same time. Did you not gather any information about him?”

“We did chase him as well while tracking the sage. However, he moves alone and, due to his abilities, it has not been easy to catch him.”

Prefacing with excuses is not a good method when reporting. However, based on experience, when Ever spoke like this, there was always a statement that overturned it following, so Yuder listened without worry.

“However, my colleagues thoroughly investigated and analyzed even the floating rumors near their base and were able to discover something.”

“What is that?”

“Around the time we suspect the sage arrived at the base, people in several villages near the desert heard explosions. They thought it was the sound of monsters fighting. There had been similar incidents before.”

A smile formed on Kishiar’s lips.

“But it was baseless noise, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, we couldn’t find anyone who had seen it directly. So, as we investigated further…”

Beneath the desert sands lie dangerous monsters with hard shells. They sometimes fight and devour each other, and the sound can resemble explosions, as explained by the villagers who heard them.

However, such incidents had become particularly frequent about a year ago, according to Ever’s investigation.

“So, I thought that the monster sounds the villagers spoke of might be a misconception. There are few villages in that area, but no one talks about such monsters in the slightly distant regions.”

“So, you’re suggesting that either the sage or Nahan’s abilities could have been enough to create noises that mislead a few nearby villages?”

“Exactly. And according to the people there, the explosions they heard this time were more intense and longer than ever before. Considering that the sage’s movements were traced outside the desert only after that, perhaps…”

Ever spoke more cautiously than ever, but with certainty.

“I suspect Nahan arrived at the base before the sage and later had a conflict with the returning sage. The people only mistook the noise for monsters.”

Afterward, the sage left the base. That meant, despite the disturbance, the sage at least had not died.

But had Nahan lost?

Yuder thought not. Nahan was not the kind of person to just fall, no matter how severe his injuries or how many capable companions he lost.

‘If the sage has left there, then Nahan would have followed him. Then Nahan too must have come to Charloin by now. Maybe he, like the sage, is already lurking somewhere here.’

As Yuder pondered, Ever continued to speak.

“If we could have confirmed the location of their base more certainly, we would have been able to assert with greater confidence based on the traces. However, I thought it better to return here as soon as possible to report, rather than searching for it.”

Her mission was not to find out the base of the Star of Nagran, but to follow the sage and redeem herself from the last encounter. Knowing this, Ever left Devran behind and returned first.

Kishiar sent words of praise to Ever for her decision and the information she brought.

“It’s excellent how you delved into every suspicious aspect without overlooking it. But I believe you know better than anyone that to give full meaning to this, we cannot stop here.”

“Yes. I will certainly catch that cunning one with my own hands, to ensure he never escapes the Cavalry again.”

Ever clenched her fist tightly.

“Good. Then let’s leave the search for the exact location of the base to Devran, plus Pruelle, Revlin, and a few successful candidates willing to help us. It’s not immediately necessary, but it’s still something that needs to be done.”

“I’ll get them prepared.”

“Additionally, call in some members from the capital and from the eastern and western regions to search for the Star of Nagran’s central base. It’ll be a headache to handle all these tasks simultaneously, but it’ll be easier next time if we finish it this time.”

This was a declaration of intent to ensure that neither the sage nor Nahan could escape to a base in case of another conflict.

Everyone, including Yuder, nodded in agreement to Kishiar's words.

"Yes, understood!"

After Ever and the Eldore siblings left, Kishiar spoke to Yuder.

"It's quite the timing that the sage and Nahan have come here, just when people like Duke Herne and Kiolle da Diarca have arrived. In the midst of all this, we also have to be wary of unpredictable cracks and natural disasters."

"It turned out to be quite a situation."

"One slip and it'll be troublesome."

His tone was light, but the light tapping of his fingers on his temple and the dark red of his eyes said otherwise. Yuder could only guess at the whirlwind of complex thoughts swirling in Kishiar's mind from these small signals.

'Yet, he won't show it outwardly. That's the kind of person he is.'

That didn't mean there was nothing to be said.

Yuder took a deep breath and then blurted out.

"I actually see it as a good thing."

"Hmm?"

"The matter of the cracks is one thing, but the rest is just tasks that we had to do anyway, coming to us a bit sooner and at the same time. It would be more logical to swing our hand once and catch multiple prey at the same time."

Yuder raised his hand and lightly clenched his fist.

“Please give the order whenever. I’m ready.”

Kishiar stared intently at Yuder’s expressionless face for a moment before suddenly bursting into laughter like a blooming flower.

“Hmm… Did I ever tell you that every time you make such bold, impressive, and reassuring statements, I find myself falling for you all over again?”

“What?”

“Didn’t I? Then what about wanting to hug you and kiss you?”

“What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

“I want to do that right now.”

Expecting otherwise was always meaningless when it came to Kishiar.

He always really did what he said.

-

“Ugh.. damn it… damn it, it hurts… it hurts too much.”

Dieman sat huddled in a corner of an empty warehouse, crying. His hand, wrapped in tattered cloth and riddled with terrible wounds, oozed with blood and pus incessantly.

“I will kill him… I truly will kill him…!” he seethed.

Only a short time ago, his hands had been whole.

Precisely speaking, this was true until he had safely escaped the capital with the sage, returning to the South.

Until then, Diemon had been preening in self-satisfaction, having single-handedly escorted the sage out of that nightmarish place.

Those who had pompously served the sage closely and scorned Diemon had all vanished. Only the ‘copycat’ Diemon, whom they had so disdainfully regarded, remained.

Diemon believed this was because of his own strength. He was brimming with pride and happiness, dreaming of boasting about this fact to others upon his return.

However, upon entering their base village, they were greeted by an unprecedented silence.

Silence. Yes, complete silence.

The familiar villagers who should have welcomed them were nearly absent. Sera, who should have taken charge of public order in the sage’s absence, and other familiar faces were nowhere to be seen. Only a handful of feeble people remained.

The village, appearing abandoned for months, shocked not only Diemon but also the sage, who seemed not to have anticipated such a situation.

And then, as if waiting for them, Nahan appeared.

‘Damn him… cursed wretch… Even tearing him limb from limb to feed the beasts would not be enough…!’

Diemon muttered curses, recalling the face of Nahan he had encountered then.

Nahan had been smiling. A smile so incongruous on his horrific, burn-scarred face. So dreadful was the sight that Diemon, recalling the nightmare of fighting him in the capital, almost turned to flee on the spot.

He would have done so, had he not remembered that he was the only one left to protect the sage.

Ignoring the trembling Diemon, Nahan spoke to the sage.

“Didn’t expect me to be here first, did you?”

“What have you done, Nahan? Don’t tell me you’ve harmed those who should be here?”

“Harm them? My brothers and sisters? Never.”

Nahan chuckled ominously, then gestured, calling out hidden people.

The expressions on the faces of those who should have been overjoyed to see the sage were strangely ambiguous. One of them asked, with a confused and sour expression,

“Sage, didn’t you say you were going to meet the high officials to protect us? Why didn’t you return even once while the other brothers and sisters were away? We kept waiting.”

Following this, others began to speak.

“Sage, Sera said she was following your instructions and left with the Southerners. She never returned. Where did she go?”

“Sage, is it true that the Star of Nagran is collaborating with the Cavalry?”

“Sage, did you really go for our sake? Why don’t we see the others, only Diemon?”

“Sage, Nahan said you wouldn’t keep your promise. Is that true? Can’t we move to a safer place?”

“Sage.”

“Sage…”

It was a scene nightmarishly fearful. Diemon was aghast, but the sage was not startled. He stood firmly and asked Nahan, “What have you done to them, Nahan?”

“I have awakened them to the truth. Just like me.”

“That’s impossible.”

“Why do you think that way? It’s all for the sake of the Star of Nagran.”

At these words, the sage’s face turned deathly pale.

Then, Nahan, with a smile, raised his hand.

“Let’s have the conversation we couldn’t have back then, shall we? A very honest conversation.”

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Chapter 809

“Let’s have the conversation we couldn’t have back then, shall we? A very honest conversation.”

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

“If you don’t understand, let me enlighten you. I now clearly know what your abilities are and how they have affected me.”

“…”

“Why, did you truly not anticipate such a day would come?”

Diemon was utterly baffled by what Nahan was saying.

But so were the others. Was there really anyone there who fully grasped the conflict between Nahan and the sage?

“There’s nothing more to discuss with you. Your actions now are ruining us all.”

“Trying to escape even from here?”

“Open your eyes, everyone! It is Nahan who betrayed the Star of Nagran. Don’t be fooled by false words, trust this person!”

The conversation ended before it even began. As the sage shouted loudly, the people flinched. Some, regaining their senses, rushed towards them. But not everyone did.

“Come to your senses. Remember the truth I showed you.”

Diemon noticed, not without difficulty, that those who remained defiant to the end were mostly those who had followed Nahan for a long time. They surrounded Nahan, looking at the sage with eyes full of betrayal.

“We believed in you, sage. We believed you went to protect us all… but you did not return until the village came to this state!”

“Bring back Sera and the others who left under your command! Return them!”

“Believe you? Based on what? I really don’t know anymore.”

“Answer us!”

A great commotion ensued. People, divided into two groups over the sage and Nahan, fought and eventually started to unleash their powers.

Diemon struggled desperately to protect the sage but was overwhelmed. Where had the gentle people who believed and followed the sage gone, replaced by those filled with chaos and rage, recklessly reaching out to grab hold? It was like hell on earth.

The sage continued to shout hoarsely to bring them to their senses, but Nahan merely watched and laughed.

It was a smile as if to say, try as much as you can. Honestly, that smile was twice as terrifying as his dreadful illusion ability.

At the end of the turmoil, when the sage told people to stop and back off, he only replied with one sentence.

“If that’s what you want, then speak the truth and keep your promise for the sake of the Star of Nagran.”

In a moment of dire crisis with no escape, Diemon had an idea.

He could only copy and use one ability at a time. To use an ability he had copied before, he had to find its original owner and go through the process of recopying it, which was impossible in such chaos.

But that was only for powers copied in the usual way.

There was one time in Diemon's life when he had properly obtained 'permission' from the original owner of an ability and went through all the preliminary steps to perfectly replicate every aspect of that power. Considering that most Awakeners disliked having their abilities copied, this was an astonishing feat.

The power to control monsters.

It was an ability he copied before going to the capital, at the sage's suggestion.

The original owner of that power was a boy who had not long arrived from the East, who, upon hearing the sage's earnest request, changed his reluctant mind and allowed Diemon to perfectly replicate his power.

At that moment, Diemon realized the extent of his greatness when he perfectly copied another's ability. Unlike before, when he could only use a degraded version of others' powers, this time he was able to use the power at almost the same level as the original owner. It was thanks to this that he was able to summon a monster right in the middle of the imperial palace.

Although the boy, the original owner of the ability, seemed drained of life as Diemon copied his power, that was none of Diemon's concern.

"Yes. With that power, it might be possible to bring it forth again. I copied it perfectly… if only I can use it now!"

In a life-or-death situation, Diemon miraculously caused the ground to rumble and explode, revealing a giant centipede-like monster.

This was a method of escape taught to him by the boy, the original owner of the ability.

The appearance of the monster elicited screams from the people.

Their village, built through their collective strength, was crumbling. A burning smell pierced through the thick smoke.

Taking advantage of the chaos, Diemon fled with the sage, severely injuring his arm from a power someone had unleashed, yet he hardly felt the pain.

Just before leaving, Diemon briefly glanced back amidst the chaos.

There stood Nahan, his figure grotesquely twisted. With his broken limbs and face exposed, he smiled brightly amidst the flames, saying something unbelievable.

Strangely, his lip movements formed words that echoed clearly in Diemon's mind.

"Farewell. And let's meet again soon, brother."

Escaping was a miracle, but the aftermath was catastrophic.

First, Diemon's injured arm worsened and did not heal. He had been struck by a power mixed with fire and poison. But worse was when he first saw his reflection in the water upon arriving in Charloine.

"Is… is that person me? That's me?"

Diemon had aged. The reflection in the water showed him having aged about 20 years, his state wrinkled and frail. To anyone looking, he was unrecognizable from the young man he once was.

At least his hair hadn't thinned, making him look a bit younger than the sage. But what did that matter?

No matter how much he felt his face, he couldn't reverse the transformation. Had he known that using his power to its limits would leave such aftereffects, he would have never used it! Diemon was in deep despair.

But like deepening pain, his despair was not the end.

"Huh…"

Diemon stared at the closed door beyond the empty warehouse. He could have endured these terrible pains if he believed they were sacrifices made to

protect the sage.

But where was the sage he had risked so much to save?

“….”

Yes. The Sage had hardly been around since they arrived in Charloine. The reasons were varied.

At first, he went out to bring a doctor.

Next, he said he was meeting people who could help them.

And then… what did he say next time?

Diemon couldn’t remember. Each time the sage returned, he begged him to stay and treat him, but the sage did not comply.

The reasons were varied then too. Nahan was tracking them, he said. It was difficult to find allies. Sera and the others might be captured by the Cavalry. The Cavalry was spread throughout the city.

Then, gradually, even such responses ceased to come.

Each time the sage returned from outside, he grew increasingly somber. His appearance became dirtier day by day, his eyes bloodshot. Clearly, things were not going as planned.

‘Still, when he last returned the day before yesterday, he didn’t look so bad.’

Diemon groped through his foggy mind to recall what the sage had said then.

“There’s going to be a funeral for the second son of the Herne family. A noble from the Apeto family who had helped us before is attending. I plan to meet him there. Although I haven’t met this person face-to-face, the reputation of Duke Diarca and the Crown Prince will surely be of help.”

“And me? Please let me come with you. It’s dangerous to be alone. You know that I’m the only one who can truly help you, sage…?”

Diemon pleaded pitifully. The sage said nothing, then gave a sorrowful smile.

“Diemon, you are in a lot of pain right now. Rest up. When this person returns from there, I will definitely bring a doctor along with an ally.”

That was the last thing he said before leaving. And the sage had not yet returned.

“Ugh… Uuu…”

Diemon kept crying.

It was unbearable for any human to grasp his festering arm in a place that wasn’t even a proper shelter and repeatedly faint and wake up several times a day. The fear that he might really die from this made his head feel like it would turn white.

“Save me… Please… When are you coming back, sage……. I protected you. I’m the only truly useful, real Star of Nagran…….. Take me with you…… me too!”

Where could the sage be wandering now? Would he ever return here?

With each cry of pain from his arm, Diemon’s head throbbed as if it would split, and doubt slowly crept in.

The fear intensifying in Diemon’s heart gradually extinguished his blind faith in the sage, as well as the pride he felt in having finally succeeded where other Awakeners had gradually faded. Taking their place and growing in size were equally dark and sinister emotions.

The sound of rats squeaking echoed in the darkness. Those creatures gnawed at his hands and feet whenever Diemon lost consciousness. Was there anything more terrifying than the thought of these beasts, ready to

devour him upon his death? Diemon writhed and groaned, trying to shake off the rats.

“No. I don’t want this…… I don’t want to die like this……!”

It was then.

The door opened, letting in a thin light.

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Chapter 810

Diemon, turning his head with a bright face, thinking the sage had returned, froze in place upon seeing the long shadow looming over him.

It was none other than the very person he had just cursed to death, standing there.

“Na… Na…han…!”

“Brother, didn’t I tell you?”

That we would meet again soon.

With those words, Nahan lifted the corners of his lips. In that smile, too faint to be considered joyful, Diemon’s spine chilled.

“How on earth did you, here.”

“Did you think I’ve been waiting here without any preparations? Huh?”

“The sage, the sage is not here!”

Diemon shouted, but his voice trembled pitifully.

“It seems so. Abandoned by the sage, you’re left here alone, aren’t you?”

“No! The sage is… The, the sage is…”

Diemon’s outcry faded as he heard Nahan’s footsteps slowly approaching him.

“The sage is…”

Finally, standing right in front of Diemon, Nahan bent down and grabbed his head with one hand. The hand, wrapped in bandages, faintly reeked of old blood. Then, incongruously tender, a whisper reached Diemon’s ears.

“Brother, you have two paths before you. One is to die here alone, upholding loyalty to a traitor and becoming food for rats.”

“Uugh…!”

“And the other is to tell me where the sage went and receive at least minimal treatment from the brothers who followed me. Of course, afterward, you’ll face punishment for inflicting pain and death upon countless brothers and sisters at our base.”

Which do you choose?

In front of that devilish question, Diemon urinated in fear, having a seizure.

-

“Hmm. So, Nahan and the sage might be in this city somewhere right now?”

“Yes. So be careful, make sure Hosanna doesn’t get wind of this for a while.”

“That won’t be a problem. Hosanna seems distracted by something other than Nahan himself these days.”

Today, one day before the funeral of Herne’s Second Prince Ashrav.

Yuder, having a rare conversation with Kanna, furrowed his brows at this unexpected topic.

“He’s showing interest in something other than Nahan?”

“Yes, that’s what I came to talk about. Remember the Herne’s First Princess who visited recently?”

“Princess Myra.”

“Yes. Remember when Hosanna briefly encountered her last time?”

Of course, he remembered. He had run into Kanna and Hosanna while leading the unwell Myra to the medical unit.

‘At that time, Hosanna seemed to be hiding, not even lifting his head properly.’

“After the Princess left, Hosanna asked for her name. Since then, he often inquires about her and Herne, and although he seemed to be trying to hide it, something unusual is definitely going on.”

Hosanna and Princess Myra. The connection between these two seemingly unrelated individuals was puzzling.

Yuder calmly asked Kanna.

“You’ve read the information, right?”

“Of course. There was nothing direct, but that might be because Hosanna knows so little about Princess Myra. However, the emotions Hosanna feels when her name comes up are clear: confusion and fear.”

“Confusion and fear…”

“Listen, maybe… the noble house where Nahan and Hosanna were, could it possibly… have some connection to Herne? Otherwise, there’s no way Hosanna would know about the Princess.”

“Hmm…?”

Yuder, lowering his voice secretly, gazed into Kanna’s eyes, lost in thought.

Kishiar had already received a report from Yuder about Nahan’s past and the oath that bound Hosanna. They were tracking down Nahan’s former residence based on the tale and simultaneously searching for a way to break Hosanna’s binding oath.

The oath on Hosanna was particularly troublesome, different from the double oath prohibition that had killed assassins in the past.

Firstly, the oath that bound him wasn't issued using an official temple scroll, yet, paradoxically, it possessed a power equal to, if not stronger than, the temple's own. Kishiar surmised that it must have been made by an official temple craftsman.

In other words, it was an illegal product, stronger than the original, made deliberately by a genuine craftsman who had erased his name.

At that time, Kishiar twisted his lips into a smirk and said, "Such cases are rare. Very rare. It means someone who could afford an official oath sought an illicit, more powerful version."

There was only one way this could be possible: the person had enough power and wealth to make such a request to a temple craftsman.

How many families could casually use such an item to silence a bastard and his servant? Not many, he assumed.

The Herne Dukedom, rulers of the south and their influential branched families, certainly fit the bill.

'Perhaps something has already emerged in Kishiar's ongoing investigation, but it wouldn't hurt to have an additional clue.'

Yuder concluded his thoughts and decided.

"It sounds like a plausible theory. I'll mention it to the Commander."

Kanna was pleased with Yuder's response.

Upon hearing Kanna's speculation, Kishiar also showed considerable delight.

"I was already investigating Nahan's old house based on Hosanna's information, but the search was proving more difficult than expected. This is good news."

"I thought you might already know something."

“Well, if you think about it, if it’s hard to find despite being such a notable incident, it means someone powerful must have covered it up afterward.”

The exact location in the south where Hosanna and Nahan had lived was unknown. However, Nahan was likely a noble’s bastard or belonged to a family of similar wealth and honor, and had escaped by burning down a building about 2-3 years ago.

A fire involving a powerful family wasn’t common and would have been noticeable. So, if it was hard to find as Kishiar said, it meant someone had deliberately buried the incident afterward.

“But we did have one suspicious event in mind.”

‘Of course.’

If Kishiar had set his mind on finding it, it was unlikely he’d have found nothing at all.

Kishiar smiled and handed over a stack of papers from his desk.

“It was thanks to the quick cooperation of the Emperor and Empress’s informants in the south. Want to take a look?”

The incident Kishiar focused on was succinctly described. Yuder quickly gleaned the key points from the brief intelligence report.

“About six months after the Red Stone fell. A building in a small area of southern Conkachista collapsed due to an accident. The building was registered as a warehouse belonging to a trading company, but in reality, it was a luxurious mansion. There were rumors from local residents that it wasn’t a collapse but a fire that completely consumed it.”

“Testimonies claimed it was difficult to ascertain the identities of those frequenting the mansion due to their secrecy. People assumed it was a noble’s villa.”

“The lord of Conkachista was a hard-line aristocratic figure, making records of casualties and the demolished building from the accident

untraceable. The central administration's reports from the time of the accident were also partially lost."

Having read this far, Yuder let out a thoughtful hum.

"This certainly seems like an incident worth suspecting."

At first glance, it appeared to be a common case of some foolish noble or wealthy folks disguising a villa as a trading company warehouse, only to lose it in an accident.

But the timing of the event, soon after the Red Stone fell.

The fact that it was reported as a collapse, yet the locals knew it as a fire.

And the lord of the area being a hard-line aristocrat - all these points combined emitted a strong scent of a deep cover-up.

"Right? Now, if we cross-reference the lord of Conkachista with someone from the Herne family and track Princess Myra's whereabouts at that time, we might easily find a connection."

"The quickest way would be to explain the situation to Princess Myra herself at the funeral tomorrow and ask for her cooperation."

"Oh, you've already seen through my plan."

Kishiar replied playfully as he stood up.

"Speaking of which, have you prepared your outfit for tomorrow?"

"…It's a funeral, not a party. What else to prepare but a mourning dress?"

A bright color would have been problematic, but the uniform of the Cavalry was fundamentally black. Being a part of the uniform, it wouldn't be disrespectful to wear it at a funeral.

However, Kishiar shook his head.

“Oh no, the princess personally sent us a card inviting us, so we must do more. Especially in the south, where etiquette for ceremonies like this is highly valued.”

A sense of foreboding brushed Yuder’s back as he listened.

And soon, that premonition came true.

“I thought as much and had already prepared a formal attire to wear. It arrived earlier; want to try it on?”

“…”

The next morning.

Yuder frowned as he looked at the sleet falling from the overcast sky.

‘Even though it’s the day of the funeral, the weather didn’t have to be like this.’

On such a day, it’s hard for horses and carriages to move, and people’s senses dull. Of course, Yuder’s senses wouldn’t be affected that much, but considering he and Kishiar, among others, were to move together today, caution seemed advisable.

“Already dressed and ready?”

Lost in thought, Yuder was approached by Kishiar. Expecting him to come close, Kishiar instead stopped and looked Yuder up and down with an unreadable smile.

“…Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Uhmm. I have an intensely personal and secretive feeling that would not be appropriate for the journey to send off the dead and empower the living.”

It seemed his smile was one of satisfaction.

Indeed, when Yuder had tried on the clothes the day before, Kishiar had been quite pleased. Despite not seeing the outfit himself and making a hasty choice, Kishiar had commented about five times how well the southern-style formal wear suited him.

But honestly, such remarks seemed more fitting for the man currently shining beautifully in similar attire.

Kishiar, draped in a long, flowing, and voluminous black formal coat that reached his feet, looked almost sacred, making one momentarily forget the gloomy weather outside. He was like a black gem in himself.

“Isn’t the long coat inconvenient?”

“No. It’s fine. The sword hidden underneath isn’t visible, so it’s actually better.”

As Yuder slightly lifted the hem of his coat to show the sword strapped behind his waist, Kishiar’s eyes softened.

“Well then, shall we go? Everyone must be waiting outside.”

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Chapter 811

Not long after the Commander of the Cavalry, his assistant, a few members, along with Sunz and Emon, had departed the branch in a carriage, a timid exchange unfolded.

“Um… Kanna… Deputy Commander.”

“Yes?”

“Today is the funeral of the Herne Duke’s family, isn’t it?”

Kanna lifted his gaze to Hosanna, who had asked the question. Despite not saying anything significant, the frail-looking young man from the south avoided eye contact, fiddling with his fingers as if he had committed a grave error. He hesitated before speaking again.

“It’s just… it seems a bit noisy outside. It just came to my mind, suddenly.”

Hosanna was remarkably bad at hiding things. Even without using any special abilities, it was easy to guess what he was thinking.

‘It wasn’t sudden. He’s been worried about it all along.’

Yet, Kanna responded with a smile, pretending to be oblivious.

“Yes, that’s right. I met the Commander and Yuder earlier. They were dressed in funeral attire.”

“Oh…”

“The Commander is naturally handsome, so there’s no question about that, but you should have seen how surprised people were by Yuder. Of course, Yuder didn’t like it!”

Kanna greatly admired and sometimes respected his friend Yuder Aile, who had no interest in personal adornment. So indifferent was he to such matters that on casual dress days, he alone would wear his stark black uniform, becoming a legend in his own right.

His hair, always just long enough to potentially cover his eyes, and his consistently cool, expressionless demeanor meant few realized his potential to stand out if dressed up.

‘Of course, some found his dark and intimidating air decadently attractive.’

Yuder was a conspicuous figure, in a different way than Kishiar. It would have been more surprising if someone with his power didn’t stand out. His silent presence alone drew attention.

And Kanna, often by Yuder’s side, had inadvertently read many secret thoughts of those evaluating him. It wasn’t intentional; she just hadn’t mastered controlling her power.

Nevertheless, there were times when Yuder, usually so hidden in his plain uniform, would fully reveal his hidden gem-like qualities.

That was on the days when the Commander ordered him to wear formal attire.

Knowing his assistant had no flair for dressing up, the Commander, who had dominated the capital’s fashion for years, would personally ensure Yuder was properly attired. After his touch, Yuder always emerged in a form that astonished his comrades.

And today was no exception.

‘It’s all black attire, whether it’s the uniform or the formal wear. How does he manage to look so good in it? The half-up hairdo was refreshing, but that wasn’t all. Commander’s skill is truly amazing.’

When Yuder appeared in his formal wear, the members whistled at the rare sight. Even the imperial soldiers and passersby, seeing his neat appearance

for the first time, were shocked, questioning if that handsome man was truly Yuder Aile.

Of course, this ceased when the incomparable Kishiar appeared, but it was still amusing.

Lost in a moment of pleasant reminiscence about the amusing scene, Kanna quickly sobered up as she recalled the esteemed Commander and her friend walking shoulder to shoulder. '…Hmm, let's stop thinking about that. It might bring back memories I've been trying to forget.'

"Anyway, I was originally supposed to go with them, but I had to stay behind due to some work. I'm glad for it, but I'm a bit worried about Gakane who went in my place. Ah, you know who Gakane is, right?"

"Um… Yes. The handsome Cavalry member with red hair….."

"Ha ha, right. When it comes to Gakane, 'handsome' is always the first word that comes to mind."

As Kanna laughed heartily, Hosanna managed a faint, hesitant smile. Kanna, maintaining a cheerful demeanor, quickly revisited the conversation in her mind.

'Today, Hosanna seems quite alright. Should I delve further and try to read more information?'

However, doing so would mean using a walk as an excuse to go outside. The basement of this southern branch was within Reneve's domain, which suppressed abilities, making it hard for Kanna to use hers.

Therefore, whenever she wanted to investigate Hosanna directly, she used the excuse of needing fresh air to step outside briefly with him. This was a secret Hosanna was yet unaware of.

'The weather isn't great today, but a bit of fresh air outside shouldn't be unwelcome.'

"Um, Hosanna, would you like to go for a walk today?"

“Ah… Yes, I’d like that. I’m grateful…”

“Great. Just wait a moment. I’ll let the others know and be right back.”

But the opportunity did not present itself. The urgency of someone knocking and calling for Kanna interrupted them.

“Kanna! Are you here? Kanna!”

Startled, Hosanna stepped back. Opening the door, Kanna blinked at the unexpected faces.

“Eh? Hinn… Finn too? What’s going on?”

“The guy we’ve been chasing! You know?”

“We’ve finally found something here! But the traces are unusual!”

“So, Ever told us to bring you! Just in case!”

“It’s an important day, so we need to be quick and careful! No time to waste, let’s go!”

The two, already self-centered in their speech, rapidly fired off sentences, leaving Kanna overwhelmed.

Yet, with the ability to read and categorize a plethora of information in the blink of an eye, Kanna managed to make sense of their words.

‘It seems they’ve found traces of the sage within Charloin, and it’s unusual. Today, with many gathering for the Herne family funeral, they want my help just in case. Hmm, got it!’

“Okay, I understand, I’ll go. Hosanna! Sorry, but I have to leave now. Could I ask another member to take you for a walk?”

There was no need to send Hosanna for a walk in Kanna’s absence.

However, to avoid unnecessary suspicion and to maintain trust by fulfilling her word, Kanna decided it would be better to send him out briefly.

“Ah, wait! Just a moment!”

Hosanna hastily grabbed Kanna’s sleeve as she was about to leave.

“Those people have found something about the sage or Nahan, right? If you’re going for that, then I… I can help!”

“Yes?”

“I can help, too! You know my power. I can move faster than anyone. I know the most about them. And, if we meet, I might be able to persuade them… if you permit me!”

‘Oh no.’

It seemed that Kanna wasn’t the only one who had understood the chaotic words of the Eldore siblings.

Naturally, Kanna replied that she could not comply with the request.

“I’m sorry, but that won’t be possible. Don’t forget, Hosanna, that our agreement to cooperate was only until your arrival in the South. Expecting more would be excessive.”

“Ah…”

“However, I’ll tell you what happened when I return. So, please go on your walk quietly.”

Kanna’s response was gentle yet firm, leaving no room for argument. A dejected Hosanna slumped down with a sad expression. As Kanna left, she glanced back at her sleeve, which Hosanna had grabbed, with a slight unease.

“Hmm…”

‘Did I feel something strange when he grabbed my sleeve? What was it?’

“Kanna, what are you doing?”

“We need to hurry!”

The Eldore siblings were causing a commotion up front. Kanna, shaking off the unexplainable sensation, called over a member of her group. It was a sturdy, tall member with formidable fists.

“I was supposed to go for a walk with Hosanna, but I can’t now. Could you take my place?”

“Um, sure.”

“Don’t stay out too long, just in case. And make sure to hold onto his arm.”

She added this unusual instruction because of the faint uneasiness she had felt earlier.

“You probably won’t have to worry about that, look outside.”

The sky, which had been overcast and drizzling sleet since morning, had now darkened almost to the point of nightfall. Thick clouds completely obscured the sun.

“Even someone who’s been locked away without sunlight for ten years would want to turn back in this weather.”

“Um… maybe.”

“It’s not a maybe, it’s a certainty.”

“Kanna!”

The increasingly impatient Eldore siblings stamped their feet.

“We’re going to use our powers to get there! We need to leave here quickly!”

Kanna, resigned to the situation, smiled and waved her hand.

“Alright, alright, I get it. Let’s go now, everything’s finished!”

Kanna and the Eldore siblings departed.

The member, following Kanna’s instructions, took Hosanna, who was shrouded in a robe, for a walk. Unlike walks with Kanna, this path was silent, yet Hosanna showed no sign of discontent.

In truth, any displeasure would have been hard to discern in his covered state.

Contrary to the member’s expectation of a brief walk, Hosanna, leaning on his umbrella despite the poor weather, continued his stroll. He circled the training ground behind the branch building repeatedly, turning the walk into a tedious and chilly ordeal.

The member, hesitating, cautiously suggested.

“Um, shall we go back now? Even if winters in the South are mild, walking any longer might lead to a cold.”

“…”

“Hey?”

Receiving no response from Hosanna, the member, feeling frustrated, moved his hand up from Hosanna’s arm to his shoulder, intending to peer at his face.

In that brief moment.

A fleeting gap when their skins parted.

Suddenly, the necklace around Hosanna’s neck made a crisp snapping sound and broke apart.

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Chapter 812

The necklace around Hosanna’s neck suddenly cracked with a crisp sound and broke apart.

“…What…?”

Before he could even react, Hosanna’s figure vanished from the eyes of the member in an instant.

“What, what?!”

The arm of the member, who had tried to catch Hosanna, flailed powerlessly through the air and fell to the ground. He stared blankly, as if time had stopped, and then let out a cry of horror.

“Emergency! The prisoner has escaped!”

The member had certainly let his guard down. However, as with all things in life, not everything was his fault.

The weather was exceptionally bad, and on that day, no members were outside the branch.

The Eldore siblings, caught up in their excitement, had carelessly failed to completely control the information.

Kanna, having left her post, entrusted Hosanna to someone unfamiliar with him, and everyone momentarily overlooked how this fragile Awakener young man had astonishingly and rapidly recovered his abilities in the face of desperation.

The strange sensation Kanna had felt before she left was Hosanna’s power growing explosively in the face of immense desperation and anxiety, shaking the control necklace.

Despite his appearance and personality making it difficult to recognize, Hosanna was an Awakener with tremendous potential, even judged by Yuder Aile as having no equal in the future in terms of mobility.

Even the suppression device, which functioned within Reneve's domain, weakened once outside. Still in its prototype phase, it was unprepared for the sudden increase in the power it was suppressing.

And all these factors together gave Hosanna his chance.

The startled unit members quickly emerged to search for Hosanna. Some swiftly headed toward their Commander and colleagues.

In the chaos, even the prisoners trapped underground sensed something unusual.

"What's happening? What's going on outside?"

Most were anxious or curious, but one man in solitary confinement was different.

The man named Aton, shackled with knightly fetters on his hands and feet and wearing a power suppression collar, opened his eyes quietly, listening to the faint sounds of running. His keen senses, honed by his exceptional swordsmanship, quickly discerned the problem outside.

'Someone has escaped. It's surprising that someone could break through those demonic guys.'

He thought of the demonic-tongued Commander of the Cavalry with a beautiful face, and the black-haired monster who had thrown him down to the very bottom of the underground.

They must have thought they could learn something by imprisoning Aton here, but he wasn't overly concerned about what would happen after his capture.

There were many who could take his place.

The balance of this land was already tipping. What Aton did was merely drill a small hole in an already tilting ship, but once a hole is made, it only takes a slight shake for water to start leaking.

And that time might just be now.

Ding-

Above the heads of those breathlessly running, amidst the coldly swirling sleet, the first bell toll echoed from a distant bell tower.

It was a solemn sound, signaling the start of the funeral.

-

Listening to the long, continuous bell tolls, Yuder momentarily turned his gaze toward the bell tower.

But this was only a brief diversion; he soon turned his head back to gaze at the scene before him.

Under the dark storm clouds, a large temple built in the Southern style was visible. The interior and courtyard of the temple, draped in black curtains, indicated a funeral was underway. Already, it was filled with people dressed in black.

This was where the funeral of the Second Prince Ashrav was to be held today. There were so many people that it looked as if all the nobles of the South had come to attend.

However, to be honest, the atmosphere of the funeral, as seen through Yuder's eyes, seemed more like a party. There were hardly any mourners, and many seemed to be using the opportunity to engage in conversation.

Kishiar, seated in a slowly moving carriage in line to get off at the entrance of the funeral site, observed this scene and remarked,

"Well, for them, attending a funeral of someone from the Herne family must be a quite common experience. Isn't that right, Gakane, Kurga?"

Gakane and Kurga, who had come with him for the day, were both from the South. One, though fallen from nobility, belonged to a noble family, and the other was the child of a humble fisherman.

Yet, both nodded simultaneously at Kishiar's words.

"Yes, that's right."

"I remember hearing several times about funerals at the Herne Ducal House when I was younger. I've never attended one in person, though."

"Yes. But even so, we can't exactly say that this atmosphere is the most respectful. Let's make sure we stay solemn once we go in."

"Understood."

The carriage carried six passengers: Kishiar, Yuder, Gakane, Kurga, and also Sunz and Emon.

The reason Sunz and Emon were here was simple: General Gino had also decided to attend this funeral.

Yuder, as usual, was there to assist Kishiar. Gakane and Kurga were filling in for two members who couldn't make it. And Nathan Zuckerman, busy with other matters, was due to join them later.

Finally, their carriage stopped at the entrance of the temple.

There was no announcer to introduce the arrivals, as it wasn't a party. Nevertheless, those who were chatting turned their heads in silence towards them.

It was expected. When Kishiar La Orr appeared, it was typical for people to fix their gaze on him, whether they liked him or not.

Even if most had only heard of him through rumors, the reaction was the same.

"Ah…"

“Is that Duke Peletta?”

“Was he invited? How did he get here?”

Regardless of the murmurs, Kishiar walked confidently with a smile, followed by Yuder, Kurga, Gakane, Sunz, and Emon.

Among the people, who dared not speak, a familiar face suddenly popped up.

“Oh! Your Highness, you’ve arrived.”

“General Gino. You were already here.”

“Hello, General.”

General Gino, dressed in the formal uniform worn by generals at official events, greeted them with a commanding presence. Beside him stood his subordinates, among whom Yuder noticed Sunz and Emon showing great pleasure at seeing one of them.

A short-haired woman, obviously well-trained. She must be adjutant Meghna Kurlieva.

“It seems Your Highness’s excellent adjutant couldn’t make it today. I was looking forward to it as I brought Meghna with me today. It’s a shame.”

“Nathan, you mean? He might come later, so you might get a chance to meet him.”

“Oh, is that so? Meghna, It seems God has not forsaken us.”

At General Gino’s jest, Meghna Kurlieva gave a slight smile. She was said to be in her forties, but at a glance, she appeared only in her late twenties. It was a testament to her immense training.

‘Being touted as the next swordmaster doesn’t seem to be an exaggeration.’

Yuder, noticing Sunz's hesitant desire to greet Meghna, nudged him lightly in the ribs.

"Ouch!"

"Has Special Officer Galexentre Balfors also arrived here?"

There seemed to be someone who fit the description, but since it had been a long time since Yuder had last seen Galexentre Balfors, he needed confirmation.

"Ah… yes, there he is. Among the people behind adjutant Kurlieva, he's the tallest one."

'Indeed, it's him.'

Yuder scrutinized the face of the man Sunz pointed out. The face, faint in his memory, now looked younger and more foolish.

Galexentre appeared distracted, glancing around aimlessly. Had he not been in the Imperial Army uniform, he might have been mistaken for a clueless newcomer.

Noticing Yuder's gaze, Galexentre's expression contorted as if he had chewed on something bitter, while Yuder slightly lifted one corner of his lips.

'Coming here on his own accord. I should be thankful. What a fool.'

Ding- The distant bell tolled again, its count lost in time. General Gino, who was engaged in a conversation with Kishiar, turned his head at the sound.

"Oh, we should probably head into the chapel now. Will you join us?"

"Indeed."

Anyone could come to the temple to pay their respects today.

However, only those directly invited by the deceased's immediate family could enter the chapel where the formal funeral would take place, and they were allowed only one companion. Hence, aside from Kishiar, Yuder, General Gino, and Meghna Kurlieva, the rest had to stay outside.

Yuder, representing Kishiar, instructed their companions on their tasks.

"Gakane, Kurga, I'm not leaving you outside just to watch the carriage. You know that better than anyone."

"Of course, Yuder."

"There's a chance something might happen, so find a spot and keep watch. You can handle it."

"Good. Sunz and Emon will help you. Don't let your guard down. If anything happens, Gakane, you contact me."

"I'll send a shadow right away. Don't worry."

Gakane responded with a determined face.

'Gakane himself is not a concern, but the foolish nobles who have been staring at him since we arrived are a bit worrying.'

Most seemed interested in Gakane's appearance, but one could never be too sure. Given that Gakane was from the South, it was highly likely that someone here recognized him.

Nevertheless, the reason Gakane had come this far was because of the trust in his skills and capabilities.

After patting Gakane and Kurga on the shoulders, Yuder turned around. Kishiar was waiting for him with a smile.

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Chapter 813

“Duke Peletta, General Gino, you’ve arrived.”

Upon entering the chapel, they were naturally greeted by First Princess Myra.

Myra, her face half-hidden beneath a black-veiled hat, looked much healthier than she had a few days ago. It seemed Enon’s medicine had worked wonders.

General Gino, maintaining appropriate decorum, expressed his condolences to Myra. Though it was well-known that General Gino had a strained relationship with the Lord of Charloin, his rapport with Myra didn’t seem as bad.

Kishiar followed, presenting Myra with flowers prepared for the deceased and their family. He spoke, “It’s always a hard and heartbreaking task to send a loved one far away. I sincerely pray that God embraces his soul.”

“Thank you. Ashrav’s soul would be pleased to hear your words,” she replied.

After Meghna Kurlieva and Yuder had exchanged greetings with Myra, they entered the vast space where the coffin lay. The area was much less crowded than outside, and the atmosphere was somber.

“A bit sorry to say this, but the funeral might start later than planned… My father hasn’t arrived yet,” Myra’s voice was so soft, only Kishiar and Yuder could hear. Her lips barely moved as she spoke.

“Oh, is there some trouble?” Kishiar inquired.

“I only know he was up late praying for my brother’s soul, weary with grief.”

“Ah, it seems the depth of his sorrow kept him from sleep.”

“Yes. Perhaps he spent the night in vigil prayers with some ladies he’s not seen before.”

“But thanks to this, everyone here today can see more clearly the brilliant capabilities of the one who will lead Herne. That’s something to be thankful for.”

At Kishiar’s sly remark, a hint of a human smile finally broke through Myra’s cold facade.

“You have a way of offering comfort in the most delightful manner.”

“The key is always speaking with sincerity.”

Yuder, who had been silently listening to the conversation, suddenly felt a piercing gaze.

‘Hmm?’

Turning, he met the intense gaze of Kiolle da Diarca, staring at him intensely.

‘So, he has become a guest of Herne, as I heard. He’s here.’

Kiolle looked the same as ever, which in Yuder’s mind meant still foolish.

‘But what’s with that expression?’

Usually, Kiolle would either gleam as if seeing something unbelievable or arrogantly turn away upon seeing Yuder. This time, it was similar yet different. His usual annoying demeanor was there, but beneath it, his mouth seemed desperate, earnest, wanting to say something…

‘I can’t make out what he’s trying to say with his mouth. He looks even more foolish than usual.’

Yuder thought Kiolle was still the same fool, even though they were bound to talk since they had met. He ignored Kiolle's fumbling lips and turned away.

As this happened, Myra and Kishiar's conversation was also drawing to a close.

"Ah, other guests I must greet have arrived. Let's continue our conversation before you leave."

"Of course."

"You may sit until the funeral starts, or feel free to talk if you see familiar faces. Now, if you'll excuse me…"

Yuder followed Kishiar, speaking in a low voice.

"Have you discussed the matter of Hosanna?"

"I've broached the topic. We'll have a detailed conversation later."

"I see. Then, before the ceremony starts, I'll have a brief talk with that fool over there."

Kishiar's lips curled into a painted smile as he followed Yuder's gaze.

"Oh, it seems you've grown too fond of him, I'm almost jealous."

"Such jokes are not welcome, even from you, Commander."

"I mean, keep it brief. I might get lonely."

Yuder didn't know how to respond to that.

Kishiar blinked his long lashes and stroked his cheek, feigning a look of loneliness. Despite knowing it was an act, Yuder found it eerily fitting. He sighed softly, brushing his eyes.

"…I'll try to return quickly."

Kishiar chuckled. Yuder thought his eyes resembled those of Cavalry members when they looked at a small, adorable, and cute creature… like a cat named Nipollen.

“Recently, there’s been a rampant rumor about the youngest son of a certain ducal family reforming his ways. Have you heard?”

“Please tell me that reformed scoundrel isn’t the one I’m about to meet.”

“That’s the one.”

“It’s hard to believe. Even if he has become quieter to avoid eternal slumber, is that enough to start such rumors?”

Rumors of Kiolle da Diarca’s transformation had spread from within the Diarca family and the Imperial Knights. Known for his arrogance and foolish behavior, many initially didn’t believe the rumors. But after his recent act of protecting Duke Diarca by the lake, perceptions began to change. Many now viewed him in a new light.

“Some nobles even believe his previous actions were a ploy to lower the guards of his family’s rivals. With Duke Diarca sending him to the south, such theories have gained more followers.”

“Terrible. What are they thinking?”

How could Kiolle earn such high praise just for keeping his mouth shut? Did they forget how he had lived until now?

Certainly, there are people like Kishiar La Orr who hide cunning minds behind facades. But Kiolle da Diarca couldn’t possibly be one of them.

Yuder, deciding not to dwell on it, changed the subject.

“Anyway, I’ll go and return.”

-

‘That devilish brat! Why does he ignore me even after our eyes meet?’

At the same time, Kiolle da Diarca was barely managing his expression, sitting still. His legs trembled as if about to shake uncontrollably, and he struggled to respond nonchalantly whenever someone spoke to him.

It was absurd enough that he was at the funeral of a prince from the Herne family, whom he'd never met. To make matters worse, he was accompanied by Crown Prince Katchian, who should never have been there.

The reason was simple. The Crown Prince had run away like a child, boarded Kiolle's carriage uninvited, concealed his identity, and insisted that Kiolle must take him with him today.

Barely managing to hide the Crown Prince at the residence of the Duke of Herne, Kiolle immediately protested against the idea but eventually gave in. His best effort was to ensure that the Crown Prince could not enter the chapel.

The Crown Prince was visibly annoyed but, after desperate persuasion, agreed to wait outside.

"I'll just bear with it once more. But after the funeral, you must follow my command and find the whereabouts of the sage and a way to assist him."

The Crown Prince was mad, undoubtedly brainwashed by that healer.

"Oh, Duke Peletta has arrived. Seeing you talking with Princess Myra, it seems he was invited from that side?"

"I wonder if the Duke of Herne knows. Despite the Cavalry's achievements in the south, this seems a bit…"

"What do you think about the news of Duke Peletta being the Empire's third swordmaster, Prince Diarca?"

Caught off-guard by the southern nobles' question, Kiolle responded without thinking.

"What does it matter whether it is so or not? The real issue is outside."

His response was a jumbled mix of his current predicament and concerns for the Crown Prince outside, barely coherent.

Yet, his audience interpreted Kiolle's answer as admiringly stoic.

'Indeed, the Diarca family doesn't care whether Duke Peletta is a swordmaster. Focusing on matters outside must mean they are not concerned with the internal affairs of the Empire.'

'They say he's arrogant and foolish, but his answer seems politically adept. No wonder Duke Diarca confidently sent him here.'

'Hmm, considering the Duke of Herne immediately welcomed him into his home, maybe there's a plan to marry him off to the First Princess Myra. Even as the youngest son, he's of Diarca blood, suitable for a son-in-law.'

Had Kiolle heard these thoughts, he would have screamed at their absurdity.

'No news from outside yet, so the Crown Prince must be alright… but I can't help worrying!'

Kiolle glanced around and then rose from his seat, excusing himself.

"The atmosphere here is making my head ache. I need to step out for some air. It seems the ceremony won't start anytime soon. I trust no one finds this behavior inappropriate."

"Hmm… Of course. We understand. Please go ahead."

The attendees perceived his statement as a 'nobly' expressed dissatisfaction towards Duke Peletta, the Imperial faction present with him, and the Duke of Herne for delaying the funeral. Kiolle's reputation rose once more, from a brash young swordsman of the Diarca family to someone more calculating and secretive.

Shortly after Kiolle's departure, the black-haired assistant standing behind Duke Peletta, who was conversing with General Gino, also discreetly vanished. Yet, it was done so naturally that no one noticed.

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Chapter 814

“Where are you going?”

“Ahh!”

As Kiolle turned the corner in the quiet corridor, a hand grasped his shoulder like a ghost, eliciting a scream from him. However, before he could fully open his mouth, a swiftly extended hand clamped over his face, muffling the sound to a mere ‘Hmm!’

“Why are you so startled all of a sudden? Didn’t you expect this?”

“Um, um, um! Hmm, hmm, hmm!!”

“I can’t understand a word you’re saying.”

“Hmm, hmm! Hmmm~~!”

‘Let go of me! How dare you do this to me! Are you trying to kill me?’

Kiolle desperately tried to shout, but his voice went unheard, and he couldn’t even pry the hand from his mouth. Surprisingly, Yuder appeared smaller and thinner than Kiolle, yet his strength was inexplicably formidable.

Of course, this was due to Yuder’s slight application of his abilities, but Kiolle trembled, thinking Yuder a monster.

“Be quiet. We need to talk somewhere more secluded.”

“…”

At least this request aligned with Kiolle’s wishes. Yuder, with a now silent Kiolle, headed to a place devoid of anyone’s presence. It was a small confessional not far from the chapel.

Normally, there would be at least one priest guarding the place, but today was the funeral of the Herne Duke's family. Naturally, all other temple activities were halted, and the priests were busy with the funeral preparations.

"This should be a good spot."

"Puhah! Cough, cough!"

Finally freed from Yuder's grasp, Kiolle coughed and rolled on the floor, looking quite pitiful. After calming down, he glared with tearful eyes.

"You ruthless scoundrel…! Were you trying to kill me?"

"Couldn't you breathe with only your mouth covered? The reputation of the Imperial Knights is at stake."

Of course, Kiolle's pitiful state had no effect on Yuder.

"You've been wanting to say something since earlier. Stop gasping like a fish and speak properly. Tell me everything that's happened."

"What, what, a fish?! How can you demand that so boldly! I'm not your servant! Can't you speak with more courtesy?"

"Courtesy?"

Yuder asked as if the word were utterly foreign to him, his expression blank.

"Do you still expect me to show courtesy?"

"…"

It was terrifying.

There was no direct threat, just a simple question, yet it was spine-chillingly frightening.

Kiolle calmed down rapidly. He was bitterly disappointed that he couldn't hurl more direct and severe insults at Yuder, but he knew all too well that confronting this monster would be futile.

…And, though he hated to admit it, in this maddening situation where he couldn't ask anyone for help, he kept thinking of Yuder Aile.

"…I did have something to tell you once I arrived in the South."

"What is it?"

"During my journey here, a terrible… unforeseen incident occurred, something no one could have predicted."

"So what is it?"

It was agonizing. Should he really be telling this to Yuder?

In the throes of torment, Kiolle painfully opened his mouth.

"……H…he."

"…What?"

Yuder's brow furrowed, revealing his normally hair-concealed forehead, making his frown all the more intimidating. Yet, Kiolle had to speak. He covered his forehead and eyes with both hands and bowed his head.

Unaware that his posture was almost identical to that used in confessional, Kiolle spoke.

"…He followed me here."

"Who followed you?"

"His Highness the Crown Prince…! He followed me, me!"

His voice burst out, filled with indignation. Kiolle glanced around nervously, worried his voice had been too loud, even though he saw no one

nearby.

“Don’t worry, I’ve dampened the surrounding sounds. If anyone comes, we’ll know.”

Yuder spoke as if he had read Kiolle’s mind, which made Kiolle feel both impressed and self-resentful.

‘I can’t believe I thought of him as dependable, even for a moment!’

“So, you’re saying that Crown Prince Katchian has followed you to the South.”

“Yes! Exactly. He’s even outside right now!”

“Why would he follow you? Does Duke Diarca know?”

“How would I know?! His Highness said he had to help those charlatan healers! That’s why he came to this funeral! I managed to convince him not to come inside, but if this gets out, I could lose my father’s trust and be banished forever!”

The mere thought was terrifying.

As Kiolle agonized, Yuder murmured with an expressionless face.

“He certainly doesn’t seem to be in his normal state.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

Normally, Kiolle would have been outraged at speaking so disrespectfully about the Crown Prince, but this time, he couldn’t refute it.

“His Highness… he’s changed. It seems like he’s been brainwashed by those charlatans without me knowing. It’s unbelievable. How could something like this happen to him!”

Kiolle was in despair, yet Yuder remained calm, as if he had anticipated hearing such news.

“What about Duke Diarca’s side? Is something odd there too?”

“You really say whatever comes to mind! My father is perfectly healthy and normal! I’ve ensured it, so of course he would be!”

“Are you sure you’re not just missing something?”

Kiolle reacted passionately to Yuder’s cold question. After several minutes of heated discussion, he caught his breath and calmed down.

“No! It’s definitely not that!”

“Alright. If you insist so strongly, I’ll take it as that.”

“It’s not just insistence; it’s the truth!”

Kiolle then elaborated on the events that had happened to him. Most of the information was already known to Yuder or had been speculated with Kishiar.

The circumstances under which Kiolle met Duke Herne on his way to the South were ridiculously simple.

“I tried to send away a carriage that was blocking the way! But they recognized me and forced me into the carriage! At first, I didn’t know he was Duke Herne and got quite angry. He said he was curious about my father’s intentions for sending someone like me… and took me to his house against my will!”

Although his words were tinged with anger, they were clear enough. It seemed Duke Herne was curious if someone as brash and clueless as Kiolle was really sent by Duke Diarca on purpose.

After all, anyone would wonder if Duke Diarca had some ulterior motive in sending such a foolish person to such an important event.

Duke Diarca, well-known as a shrewd and old fox among the four great dukes, had always been in competition with the Herne family. It was possible that he had even more reasons to be suspicious.

‘Duke Diarca must have sent Kiolle to observe and disrupt us closely, but it all backfired. Does he really not realize this fool is still as clueless as ever?’

Duke Diarca was clever, arrogant, and cruel.

But even he, in front of his son’s positive transformation, seemed more inclined to rejoice than to doubt the cause. And this was the result.

To Yuder, this was more astonishing than the sage’s brainwashing.

‘Well… this works out for us. With Kiolle like this, we can easily predict Duke Diarca’s reactions in the South. It simplifies things. And as for Crown Prince Katchian…’

It was evident he had been brainwashed, but to an excessive degree.

It was surprising that he had hidden in Kiolle’s carriage to come this far. The old Katchian would never have done such a thing, suggesting his judgment and self-preservation were almost entirely gone. He was truly not in his right mind.

‘And to think, he used to be the Emperor. It’s unbelievable that he could be more foolish than Kiolle.’

The sight of someone self-destructing without any external interference was indeed strange.

“How can we send him back to the Bright Palace without a hitch? Without my father knowing. You could do it, right?”

Kiolle, still in agony, babbled nonsensically beside him.

‘What does he think my abilities are?’

He still seemed clueless, or perhaps his memory was just that bad.

Well, it wouldn’t be surprising for Kiolle of the Diarca family.

Yuder casually replied.

“People who’ve been brainwashed can’t be reasoned with. Don’t bother with this approach. As soon as you return today, leave your current location and confine him, preventing him from going outside.”

“Wha… What?! Are you telling me to confine someone…?”

“If you want to undo the brainwashing, you need to instill doubt about it. But since you’re unlikely to manage that, consider this advice.”

The sage’s brainwashing abilities were, frankly, formidable based on what he had seen so far. Far more potent than the false sage he had encountered in his previous life.

Of course, it wasn’t permanent, but how could Kiolle possibly break it?

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Chapter 815

“Why can’t you think of the simplest solution? Your esteemed father is precisely the person to consult in such situations.”

“…What?”

Kiolle’s expression was one of utter bewilderment, a face that clearly hadn’t considered the idea.

“Go and inform him. That will solve everything immediately. Why ignore a swift solution and do nothing?”

“This matter…! But what if contacting my father inadvertently leads to a discussion about His Highness the Crown Prince…!”

“Unless you’re extremely suspicious in your approach, I doubt he’d bring it up first. You haven’t let slip the Crown Prince’s absence yet, have you?”

“That’s true… My father hasn’t been directly overseeing Bright Palace lately… But still, I am an adult… Contacting my family over such a matter is something a child would do… How will my father and the others view me!”

It was ludicrous to hear such words from someone whose actions were often more childish than anyone else’s and who constantly boasted of his lineage.

“What will they think? They’ll think the same as usual. Looking too changed isn’t good either.”

“What did you say?!”

“Have you forgotten how, after you lost our duel, you used your family’s influence to have me expelled? You had no qualms about exploiting your family then; why is this any different?”

Kiolle failed to provide a satisfactory answer.

“That was in the past! Why bring it up again! How despicable!”

He was on the verge of tears and running out.

‘Such a person, claiming to be a master strategist… Everyone must be blind.’

Yuder decided to coax Kiolle a bit.

In truth, it was nothing much. Just a few convincing words would suffice for Kiolle.

“Kiolle, our Cavalry has learned that the so-called sage and his group, whom you call swindlers, are currently in this city. Imagine if they’re lucky enough to encounter the Crown Prince.”

“No! That must never happen…!”

“Better to be seen protecting the Crown Prince alone, even in the worst-case scenario, than to have rumors spread about you handing him over to the Herne family after abducting him to the south. It’ll be easier if you’re in touch with us.”

“Eww… ….”

“Still, if you’re more comfortable being with the Herne family, that’s your call. If it were me, I would’ve kicked the Crown Prince out the moment I found him hiding in my carriage. But if that’s how you express your loyalty, I’ve nothing to say.”

“Ah, how dare you speak so disrespectfully about him…!”

“Consider what’s best for you in your current situation and who to cooperate with. Imagine the worst-case scenario that could arise from dawdling within Herne.”

“…”

“And one last thing, remember your oath to assist me wherever you are.”

After saying this, Yuder looked at Kiolle’s twisted face and asked one last question.

“What will you do now?”

“You truly are a devilish being.”

Kiolle clenched his teeth in response.

“I’ll contact you in about a week! After I’ve escaped the clutches of that arrogant Duke of Herne! And I’ll catch those swindlers too, so just you wait!”

“You intend to capture the sage? Such grand aspirations. It would be best to be cautious and avoid being brainwashed if you encounter them.”

Yuder turned his gaze away from Kiolle, who was barking like a dog.

“Fine. Do as you wish. Anyway, I’m leaving now.”

“…”

“What? Is there something else you want to say?”

Kiolle, with a reluctance in his eyes unlike his usual demeanor, bit his lip hard and finally spoke.

“The… the cavalry.”

“…”

“You’re aware of the swindlers’ brainwashing abilities, right? You even mentioned earlier that you knew how to counter it.”

Yuder had obtained some information about the abilities, but he hadn’t completely figured out how to undo the brainwashing yet. Nevertheless, he

decided to continue listening, as Kiolle's expression was earnest and troubled, a change from before.

"Then what?"

"Those who are brainwashed, their, their speech and actions become strange and different. You know that, right?"

"So, what are you trying to say?"

"Well, it's just that His Highness the Crown Prince doesn't trust me, rather he has a bizarre misunderstanding about me. Honestly, if it weren't for that misunderstanding, I would never have brought him here."

So, did this mean that Crown Prince Katchian was currently brainwashed and had coerced Kiolle into moving him against his will?

'So it wasn't just that Kiolle mindlessly brought him along after discovering the prince's escape.'

Indeed. True loyalty, bearing the weight of pain and conviction without complaint, is fitting only for knights like Nathan Zuckerman. Kiolle, who feared nothing more than his father's reprimand and knew nothing of true loyalty, wouldn't have endured all this for Katchian.

"So, perhaps, you might know how to… undo the brainwashing, or at least help clear up the misunderstanding?"

"You can't do it."

"That's why! Not me, someone else! Tell me!"

Kiolle exclaimed loudly.

"If you're going to keep using me, it's not good for me to be in trouble!"

Yuder was surprised. There hadn't been a more convincing argument from Kiolle before.

“If I keep hearing such words from him, I’ll truly lose all my honor and die in disgrace!”

Yuder now became curious about what Katchian had said to Kiolle to make him suffer so.

“What misunderstanding?”

“Don’t ask about that!”

“I need to know if I’m to help you or not. If you don’t like it, then so be it.”

As Yuder turned to leave, Kiolle grabbed the hem of his clothes desperately.

“No! Don’t go! Well, you can go, but just tell me that! I don’t need anything else!”

“I don’t like your manner of asking.”

“What?!”

“If you politely and properly explain what this ‘misunderstanding’ is and then humbly ask, I might consider it. Otherwise, no.”

Yuder declared this, looking down with an expressionless face. Dressed in his impressive formal attire, he appeared even more formidable than usual.

Kiolle truly wanted to challenge Yuder Aile to a duel at that moment. However, that desire dimmed as he recalled Yuder’s terrifying abilities and the fallen Imperial Knights.

Amidst his trembling fists, Kiolle pondered over all the statements he had endured from Crown Prince Katchian.

“The anticipation of the Duke and others learning about your homosexuality is quite exciting.”

“I wonder who the partner might be. Given your pride, you surely wouldn’t consort with anyone less than a noble. But if you do, that would be even

more amusing.”

“If you don’t want to be exposed, follow my words. It means I hold all your weaknesses.”

“Surely you wouldn’t harm me. I am the finest piece presented by your family. Don’t make a foolish choice.”

It was an insanely frustrating time. No matter how much he insisted he wasn’t homosexual, no one would believe him. The effort to conceal Katchian, who seemed to have no intention of hiding his identity, had led to many desperate acts within the Herne family.

The First Princess of the Herne family, having previously met him and Katchian, found his behavior and speech perplexing, especially when he attempted to conceal Katchian’s presence. As a result, she now views Kiolle as utterly insane.

He didn’t want to endure more humiliation. And he was certainly not homosexual!

And this tremendous misunderstanding was all Yuder’s fault. If only Yuder hadn’t constantly summoned Kiolle, dragging him around, and if only Katchian hadn’t caught sight of them, this tragic misunderstanding would never have occurred.

Therefore, Kiolle believed Yuder should be held responsible for this predicament.

“This… Whose fault is this…!”

“Are you suggesting it’s my fault you’re misunderstood?”

“Yes!”

Yuder didn’t blink an eye. He crossed his arms and tilted his head as he spoke.

“Fine. I’m more intrigued now. Try asking with your head bowed.”

“This…!”

Kiolle was so angry he nearly fainted.

“If you won’t do it, then forget it.”

In the end, Kiolle, like swallowing a bitter pill, managed to explain the misunderstanding about his alleged homosexuality and even went as far as to ‘request’ help.

Although it looked more like he was swallowing tears of rage than bowing, Yuder decided to be lenient.

‘Now that I think about it, claiming it’s my fault isn’t entirely absurd.’

The idea of using the misunderstanding of homosexuality as leverage to manipulate someone was baffling.

Yuder realized anew that Emperor Katchian’s way of holding numerous nobles’ weaknesses in his previous life wasn’t accidental. Truth be told, Yuder Aile wasn’t much different. He had killed the former Cavalry Commander on Emperor Katchian’s orders, but this secretive assassination became both proof of Yuder’s loyalty and a perpetual weakness held by Emperor Katchian.

At the time, Yuder hadn’t thought of it as a weakness, but Emperor Katchian saw it differently. Whenever he distrusted or distanced himself from Yuder, he would indirectly remind him of that incident.

And then, he used it as the first charge in the death sentence, putting the final nail in the coffin.

‘Some have changed greatly since my return, but others remain the same, their nature and ultimate fate unchanged despite any transformation. Crown Prince Katchian seems to belong to the latter.’

A cold, faint smile appeared and then disappeared from Yuder’s lips.

‘And besides… if it’s just a misunderstanding of that nature, wouldn’t it be resolved simply by officially getting engaged or dating someone? Why is he such a fool?’

Katchian’s manipulation of the homosexual misunderstanding was possible because Kiolle wasn’t responding appropriately. Naturally, people would believe the misunderstanding if he didn’t speak up or defend himself. Who wouldn’t?

Kiolle seemed to have a nature that fixated on a single thought when cornered. In many ways, it was a miracle he had survived this long with such a personality.

Just as Yuder was about to speak and enlighten him on this fact, faint sounds of footsteps and shouting came from beyond the space sealed by the wind.

“The Duke has arrived!”

“Where is Sir Diarca?”

‘Ah, the father who was late to his son’s funeral has finally arrived.’

Kiolle, too, seemed to have heard the commotion, as his complexion paled. Yuder sighed softly and gestured with his eyes.

“Let’s leave for now. We can discuss this matter after you’ve left the Herne family.”

“Ugh…”

“I’ll go out first. You wait a bit before following.”

“That would make me look arrogant!”

What did it matter? Kiolle da Diarca was already known for being arrogant.

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Chapter 816

Ignoring the clamoring Kiolle, Yuder escaped the confessional and swiftly returned to his original place. His agile movements, weaving through the milling crowd, went unnoticed by all.

“Did you have a good talk?” inquired Kishiar, the exception to the oblivious.

“Yes.”

“You took longer than expected… perhaps you stumbled upon an interesting topic?”

“A person who should be in the Bright Palace is currently outside of it,” Yuder replied, delivering the crux of the matter in a voice only Kishiar could hear. Despite the shocking news, Kishiar, ever the seasoned actor, displayed an unshaken smile.

“Really? Did he sneak out on a whim to visit the south?”

“Similar. He fled to save a sage, hiding in a carriage.”

“Ah, a victim of brainwashing then,” Kishiar deduced, pinpointing the truth from just that single act of Katchian.

“Yes. Duke Diarca is still unaware, and Kiolle has asked for help.”

“Must’ve been hard for him to ask, given his pride. He must trust my assistant a great deal.”

Instead of dismissing Kishiar’s absurd jest, Yuder straightforwardly corrected him.

“Kiolle is being threatened by Katchian because of a strange misunderstanding. He seemed quite desperate.”

“A strange misunderstanding? I’m curious.”

“You might be better off not knowing.”

“That kind of statement only makes me more curious,” Kishiar mused, a response Yuder had anticipated. Taking a deep breath, Yuder continued.

“Then I’ll tell you. The prince is under the misconception that Kiolle is a homosexual. He’s been blackmailing him about informing his family, which is how he managed to follow him here.”

Yuder expected Kishiar to laugh, but his reaction was only half right. The beautiful man, clad in black ceremonial attire, maintained his picturesque smile, but his eyes told a different story.

“Hmm. That’s a rather intricate misunderstanding.”

Silence followed.

“Did the rumor about Kiolle da Diarca getting entangled with an unknown young man after the Harvest Festival influence this?”

Kishiar had mentioned that rumor before. Yuder hadn’t expected him to remember such a baseless tale. Slightly surprised, he nodded.

“Well, yes. But the direct cause of the misunderstanding might have been the party after the mission in the west, where he briefly left the party to meet with me…”

Yuder admitted to himself that he might have inadvertently contributed to the misunderstanding about Kiolle.

“But it’s a simple misunderstanding that Kiolle should have cleared up easily. His failure to do so probably means he’s just a fool.”

“Indeed, that’s likely. So, does Katchian have any guesses about who Kiolle’s partner might be?”

“No, he doesn’t seem to have gone that far.”

If Prince Katchian had been more determined to find out who Kiolle's partner was, he might have realized sooner that it was all a misunderstanding. His lack of will was another reason for Kiolle's distress.

"It would be best to clear up this misunderstanding quickly."

"I agree."

After conveying to Kishiar that Kiolle had resolved to leave the Herne House within a week, Yuder fell silent. His silence wasn't for any particular reason other than the increasing commotion around them as Kiolle had just returned to his original spot.

Kiolle, who had been the center of their conversation moments ago, sat down, panting as if he had run hurriedly. Yuder easily guessed the reason.

'He must have struggled immensely to avoid being spotted by others and return here no later than Duke Herne.'

For Yuder, moving unnoticed was as easy as breathing, but for Kiolle, with his lesser skills, avoiding the gazes of others during his escape from the confessional and return must have been quite a challenge.

The southern nobles whispered seriously among themselves upon seeing Kiolle's distressed appearance. Yuder subtly amplified their voices to his ears using his wind powers. The whispers revealed their thoughts.

"He entered later than everyone else but managed not to be later than Duke Herne. Choosing such a precise moment must have been difficult…"

"He's not to be underestimated, that's for sure."

"Duke Diarca opposes Duke Peletta and the Cavalry, who follows the Emperor. He also doesn't seem to want to give up control to Herne."

"According to the signals sent by the servants, nobody saw where Diarca went or when he came back. They say his swordsmanship is unremarkable, but maybe even that's a deception…"

Yuder retracted his wind powers after hearing this much.

‘It’s fortunate that he’s not under suspicion despite being away for so long… but this is getting absurd.’

Was nobody noticing Kiolle, who was trying to appear dignified while wiping sweat from his forehead, or was it just invisible to their eyes?

Yuder’s estimation of the southern nobles plummeted even below that of Kiolle.

Simultaneously, a grand announcement of Duke Herne’s arrival echoed throughout the chapel. All attendees fell silent as precise footsteps approached from the nearest small entrance.

‘Finally, I get to see Duke Herne in person.’

Yuder sharpened his focus, determined not to miss a thing.

After a moment, Duke Herne finally made his appearance.

He looked surprisingly young. Compared to Duke Diarca, whose beard had turned white, and even to Duke Apeto and Duke Tain who appeared relatively young but still like middle-aged men with grown children, Duke Herne looked distinctly younger. His nearly silver, long platinum-blond hair was elegantly gathered and draped over one shoulder, and he held a diamond-studded black cane. At most, he looked like he had just entered his forties.

It was hard to associate this elegant, slenderly handsome man with the rake that Myra detested. Even Yuder, well aware that appearances can be deceiving, felt this way, let alone others.

Rumors had it that he had been staying in the south for health reasons, but nothing about him seemed particularly unwell.

‘He is quite thin and uses a cane, so maybe, like Myra, it’s just a natural weakness in vitality…’

Duke Herne didn’t enter alone. His opposite arm from the one holding the cane was lightly supported by Myra. The father and daughter, with their strikingly similar platinum hair and clear grey eyes, looked like a beautifully sad and elegant family at a glance.

However, the pleasing sight only lasted so long. As Duke Herne and Myra left the entrance, a procession of about ten women followed in their wake.

Given they were coming together, it was clear these women were either family or closely associated with the family to warrant attendance at such an occasion. Yet, most of them appeared not much older than Myra. Among them, only one bore the mark of direct kinship. She alone, amidst others who seemed not to grieve, veiled her face and wept endlessly, her handkerchief drenched.

“Oh, my son… poor Ashrav!”

The fact that she was the only one crying confirmed she was the mother of Ashrav, the second son who had passed away.

‘Indeed.’

Despite appearances to the contrary, Duke Herne was indeed the womanizer Myra had described. The scene was bizarre.

The women, dressed in mourning but showing no signs of sorrow, each held a handkerchief. The crowd waited a considerable time for all of them to enter. Only then did a solemn-faced priest emerge to commence the funeral service.

Candles were lit amongst the flowers adorning the vicinity of the coffin. The somber music of sacred instruments filled and then quieted the reverent space. The sound of sleet hitting the windows outside added a melancholic resonance to the atmosphere.

“Today, we stand here facing a deeply saddening departure. Ashrav El Herne, the Second Prince, was a bright young man with exceptional talents,

destined to be a blessing to all. Yet, the divine called him to its embrace far too soon…”

It was at that moment that Yuder noticed something peculiar. The shadow cast over the coffin flickered unnaturally.

‘…Gakane?’

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Chapter 817

It was at that moment that Yuder noticed something peculiar. The shadow cast over the coffin flickered unnaturally.

‘…Gakane?’

The shadow originated from the ornate stained-glass window behind. Of course, the rest of the party, unable to enter, was outside the window.

The method Gakane and Yuder had agreed upon for communication involved capturing the end of the shadow cast by an object bridging inside and outside, allowing them to send signals discernible only to their allies.

The fact that it was now moving indicated trouble outside. To others, it might only seem like the shadow was shaking due to bad weather, but Yuder, through the subtle directions of the movement, could discern the nature of the problem.

‘Dangerous entity detected, target identified.’

The fine trembling, as if an earthquake had occurred, meant a dangerous individual was spotted, and the flickering before stopping indicated the target was someone they all knew.

If it had merely been the detection of a dangerous person, the likelihood of it being Prince Katchian would have been high. However, the following message was unmistakably clear.

Without a doubt, they had found either the sage or Nahan.

“Commander.”

Yuder softly called out to Kishiar, who, watching the same spot, nodded.

“I see it.”

“What should we do?”

“No one can leave their seat until the first eulogy is over. They seem to have sent this as a preliminary report, so let’s wait for now.”

If Gakane had urgently needed assistance, the shadow would have shown more pronounced movements. As Kishiar said, for now, it seemed like a report of having a dangerous individual under observation.

‘Such an incident right after the start.’

Had Duke Herne arrived earlier or later, Yuder might have slipped away in the nick of time. But now, with all the entrances sealed and a sudden hush, any movement would be too conspicuous, even for Yuder.

‘Whether it’s the sage or Nahan, I hope Gakane and Kurga handle it well until I get there.’

If both culprits were at the same place, it wouldn’t be this quiet. Thus, he assumed it must be one of the two, leaning more towards the sage.

‘There’s no reason for Nahan to attend a noble’s funeral. But the sage, definitely.’

While the information from Hosanna suggested Nahan might be a bastard of the Herne family or a related house, Nahan hadn’t shown any behavior of clinging to a specific family.

The sage, however, was different. If he had come here after being displaced from his base due to a clash with Nahan, he would be desperately needing someone’s help. And for him, craving power more than anyone, that someone would undoubtedly be a noble. Today, with so many southern nobles gathered in such a chaotic place, it was perfect for avoiding detection.

However, Prince Katchian, brought here by the foolish Kiolle, was also outside. If the sage and Katchian were to meet, even Yuder couldn’t predict the outcome.

‘I should have insisted Kiolle send the prince back first.’

Though Kiolle’s word wouldn’t have easily convinced the prince to return, had he known it would come to this, he would have certainly tried. Even considering personally knocking out the prince and sending him away was an option.

But the opportunity to do so had already passed. Yuder, reminding himself that there were no issues so far, decided to maintain his composure.

‘I’ll leave as soon as the priest’s first eulogy is over.’

However, for some reason, the priest’s eulogy was interminably long. Despite his extensive experience attending numerous noble funerals in his previous life, Yuder had never encountered such a long-winded speaker.

That alone would have been bearable, but the real problem erupted during the eulogy.

“How dare you yawn in front of my son’s coffin!”

The mother of the Second Prince, who had been weeping as if the sky had fallen since her entrance, suddenly stood up and slapped the cheek of another woman sitting next to her.

“What is this insolence? Such disrespect!”

“Disrespect? Did you think I didn’t know that you’ve been mocking my son’s death, laughing and gossiping about it? You beasts! How dare you come in here and sit down!”

Chaos erupted in an instant. The woman who was slapped stood up and screamed in response, while the other women nearby either cried, screamed in shock, or shouted. Amidst the tumult, one woman even clung to Duke Herne in fear.

Yuder observed Duke Herne, who was stroking the hair of the woman pretending to cry in his arms, and thought that he seemed to find the situation amusing.

Just a while ago, he had been looking boredly at the floor, but now, he was leisurely watching the fighting women. It was clear that he had no real interest in his son's funeral.

It was even doubtful whether the Second Prince Ashrav was truly his child.

But what was more surprising was the reaction of the onlookers.

"It's happening again."

"It reminds me of Prince Beniera's funeral. Something similar happened then…"

"No, that was worse. A mage got involved, and the temple nearly caught fire."

"I thought this time it would pass smoothly."

"…"

It seemed this wasn't the first time such a disturbance had occurred at a Herne family funeral. The only people who appeared shocked, with wide eyes, were Kiolle and a few others who obviously came from afar. The rest of the southern nobles watched the fight with an almost indifferent attitude.

The uproar of the fighters perplexed the priests, uncertain whether to continue the eulogy or intervene. Meanwhile, Duke Herne sat indifferent, regardless of the chaos.

'This is a real mess. Maybe I could take advantage of this and slip out.'

It was when Yuder had reached this thought.

"In front of Ashrav, what kind of disgrace is this!"

Myra, who had been quietly sitting till then, raised her voice without changing her posture.

Her voice, though still young and slightly immature, carried a definite anger that would make anyone pause.

The brawling stopped momentarily as everyone flinched. Myra glared at them and spoke again, her voice clear and firm.

“Whatever the reason, today is the day we send off Ashrav. Those who can’t maintain proper decorum should leave immediately.”

“…”

“I can overlook one outburst as excessive grief, but not a second.”

“First Princess, does that mean I should tolerate those who yawn in front of Ashrav’s coffin?”

Ashrav’s mother asked, trembling. Myra’s words were meant for everyone, but they seemed to go unheard by the woman, half-mad with overwhelming grief.

“Do not distort my words. I spoke to everyone.”

“You must be pleased! Now you will be the sole heir! But don’t be too confident about how long that joy will last! I will prove that your innocence in my son’s death is a complete lie!”

Ashrav’s mother shifted her attack from the other women to Myra. The woman who had been slapped snorted derisively and muttered audibly.

“Acting like she was ever a great mother. Is there anyone in the South who doesn’t know how bad your relationship with your son was? To falsely accuse a silent person of yawning is beyond discernment.”

“What did you say?!”

“Quiet.”

As Ashrav’s mother seemed about to erupt again, she hesitated at the sight of a white hand suddenly blocking her view. Myra, who had been sitting,

finally stood up.

Without anger but with a cold face, Myra looked alternately at the two women and said,

“I would like both of you to leave.”

“What? Why me?”

“What…! How dare anyone throw out me, Ashrav’s mother!”

The woman protested in disbelief, while Ashrav’s mother shouted in anger.

“Did I not just say? I will not tolerate any further disturbances. You have deliberately defied this again, so you must bear the consequences. Please escort them out.”

“There’s no such rule!”

“Duke Herne, I protest! Must I really be sent out too?”

The woman who had been slapped appealed for mercy from Duke Herne, while Ashrav’s mother raged. However, Myra called the house guards stationed at the entrance with a firm demeanor.

Just as they hesitated but were about to follow Myra’s command to apprehend the women, Duke Herne finally spoke.

“Myra. Let’s leave it at this.”

“…”

“Such commotion is not good. Ashrav wouldn’t have wanted this.”

This effectively included Myra in the ‘commotion’. Myra’s expression crumpled. The guards, who had been about to follow her order, immediately lowered their hands and turned away as if they had never heard such a command.

“Where are you going? Get them out of here!”

“…”

“Truly, like a fox commander.”

Yuder heard Kishiar mutter this under his breath, expression unchanging.

“It seems he wasn’t pleased with the situation solidifying her as the next heir unintentionally. He must have been waiting for such a situation to overturn her influence in one fell swoop.”

‘So that was it.’

Duke Herne, who didn’t grieve his son’s death, was unlikely to view Myra fondly.

Yuder was familiar with the sight of those in power guarding against any threat to their influence. Emperor Katchian was a prime example.

However, Duke Herne’s actions were much more cunning than Katchian’s. With just one timely phrase, he made a fool of the prospective heir in front of everyone, clearly demonstrating his absolute and thriving influence within Herne. Compared to Katchian, the title ‘fox commander’ was apt.

As Kishiar surveyed the bystanders, he suddenly raised his voice, calling Yuder.

“Assistant.”

“Yes.”

“Go out and assist the First Princess in escorting those ladies out. They clearly seem unfit to continue attending the funeral.”

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Chapter 818

“Assistant.”

“Yes.”

“Go out and assist the First Princess in escorting those ladies out. They clearly seem unfit to continue attending the funeral.”

As the fighting had quieted down, Kishiar’s voice effortlessly captured everyone’s attention.

Expressions of shock as if questioning the sanity of his action, furrowed brows, murmurs, and whispers filled the air.

Yuder sensed this as the perfect opportunity to make a natural exit. With a single statement, Kishiar could put Duke Herne to shame while assisting Myra and facilitating his own departure. Truly, the art of his eloquence was unmatched.

And Duke Herne, finally acknowledging Kishiar’s presence, turned his head.

“What a delight to see your face here.”

Despite the impossibility of not having seen Kishiar upon entering, Duke Herne behaved as if he had just noticed him. Beneath his seemingly relaxed gaze lay a thick layer of unfriendly and condescending sentiment.

Yuder surmised that Duke Herne’s late arrival was likely a calculated move to snub Kishiar in this manner.

‘Given his past behavior, it wouldn’t be surprising if his tardiness was just to ingeniously belittle and undermine others.’

Duke Herne’s pretense of seeing Kishiar for the first time was undoubtedly offensive. However, Yuder had no concerns for Kishiar. In matters of wit and words, he believed firmly that no one could match the skill of Kishiar La Orr.

And indeed, Kishiar did not betray that belief.

“Oh! Duke Herne. Do you see me?”

“…What?”

“Sigh, what a relief. I was deeply concerned that your late arrival and avoidance of eye contact with others meant you couldn’t recognize people anymore. Thankfully, that doesn’t seem to be the case, and one less worry for the Empire.”

Duke Herne’s eyes twitched momentarily, a sign of irritation. The southern nobles glanced at each other, their bodies tensing in the suddenly tense atmosphere.

Regardless, Kishiar simply smiled and gestured with his hand.

“But that aside, there are duties to be performed. What are you waiting for, assistant? Why aren’t you following my command?”

“Understood.”

Yuder bowed in agreement and moved forward. However, as he took a few steps, Duke Herne immediately raised his hand to stop him.

“This is my son’s funeral. It’s laughable for a third party to intervene in a minor family disturbance. I won’t permit you to come any closer. Step back.”

“He is not a third party but a distinguished guest. It was I who requested Duke Peletta to come here!”

It was Myra, not Kishiar, who interrupted Duke Herne. Until moments ago, she had been biting her lips in shock from her father’s manipulations. But

now, her eyes, sharp as blades even through her veil, clearly expressed her stance.

“I ordered their removal before you did, Father. When I said I would have the noisy ones escorted out and you said nothing, wasn’t that an agreement with my decision?”

“Do you think all silence implies consent, Myra? Your meddling is excessive. It’s understandable given your youth and lack of discernment, but now, step back. What will others think of you?”

“My words are not mere interference but a frank statement concerning the honor of the Herne family. If a word once spoken by a member of House Herne is so easily overturned, who would take Herne’s words seriously? This was also something Father himself said.”

With a defiant gaze towards her father, Myra boldly continued her speech, loud enough for all to hear. In the heavy atmosphere, akin to the depths of deep waters, no one dared to interrupt their conversation.

However, it was then that Kishiar burst into a loud laughter, piercing the silence.

“Duke Herne always had a way with interesting words! Wondering what others might think? Surely they would see the next heir of Herne as astute and well-educated, much like myself. Isn’t that right, General Gino?”

Caught off guard, General Gino momentarily fell silent but soon joined in with a calm smile.

“Yes. I’ve been thinking the same. The young First Princess’s abilities are remarkable. It’s said she played a significant role in stabilizing Charloin, and today proves these were not empty words.”

“Truly, a great person comes from great parents.”

With this, Duke Herne was put in a position where he could no longer casually oppose Myra’s words. Any attempt to dismiss her now and flaunt

his own influence would only make him appear ridiculous.

During Duke Herne’s momentary silence, Myra drove the final nail.

“As Father says, I am still young. There may be times when my judgment is not clear. However, my sincere desire for the peace of Ashrav and my actions guided by my learning are genuine.”

Myra then turned to address Yuder.

“Baron Aile, please assist in the removal of these people. It’s a small task to ask of the assistant to the Commander of the Cavalry and the Hero of the West, but it cannot be helped.”

This was the first time Myra had addressed Yuder as Baron Aile, a deliberate move to reveal his identity in front of everyone.

The nobles, now fully aware of Yuder’s identity, began murmuring with a different undertone. Duke Herne, too, looked at Yuder as if realizing the person he considered no more significant than a pebble on the road was actually a living being.

A mix of discomfort and a hint of interest, along with a look of condescension, filled Duke Herne’s eyes as he spoke.

“Aha, so the baron of common birth, the subject of rumors, is here.”

“…”

“I’ve heard much about you. Catching a monster as large as a mountain without laying a hand on it. I was quite curious…”

His words trailed off, but his gaze conveyed a less than favorable intention. Yuder, with a deep and unresponsive gaze, simply looked back at Duke Herne.

Meeting that gaze, Duke Hern smirked and tilted his head.

“Indeed, my daughter speaks truth. Words spoken by a Herne must not be carelessly retracted, and that applies to my words as well. Therefore… perhaps I should add another request for the Hero of the West.”

After saying so, Duke Herne cast a nervous glance at Ashrav’s mother and the woman who had been slapped, observing them indifferently.

“You may escort them out. But do it quietly, without laying a hand on them, ensuring they leave on their own accord. I haven’t seen the Awakeners ones up close, but if you bear the title of ‘Hero of the West,’ you should be capable of that much, right?”

“Father.”

“Myra. I will not tolerate any more disturbances. As you wish.”

Most people thought it an impossible request, deliberately set by Duke Herne. Even someone with great abilities, how could they possibly make those women leave quietly without touching them?

But at that moment, Yuder wasn’t alarmed by Duke Herne’s words. Instead, he was fixated on the violently shaking shadow cast over the coffin of Ashrav. It seemed that no one else in the church was aware of it due to the ongoing events, but Yuder could clearly sense it.

It was a danger signal from Gakane.

Something had happened, or was about to happen.

Simultaneously, as Yuder became aware of this, his skin prickled, and he acutely felt the air sharpen. Something was approaching from outside, heading towards them. Before Duke Herne could finish speaking, Yuder raised his hand high.

“–!”

At that instant, accompanied by an enormous noise, the giant stained glass window at the center of the chapel shattered into pieces.

“Ah!”

People screamed and rolled on the floor. The ground shook, and wind roared through. It was impossible to discern what had occurred as everything flickered black.

The congregation braced for an imminent impact. Many instinctively thought of death.

However, when the trembling subsided and they opened their eyes, they witnessed an astonishing scene.

Despite the massive stained glass window, three stories high, being completely shattered, no one inside the chapel was injured. This was because of a dome-shaped barrier, seemingly formed by water flowing from Yuder’s outstretched hand, which protected everyone inside.

“…”

But that was not all. From his other hand, wind swirled fiercely, and the raised ground in front of him seemed to be stopped by an invisible force. The flames that had toppled over the coffin hovered in mid-air, burning nothing and not extinguishing, casting light around.

In a scene akin to a miracle, Yuder turned his head towards Duke Herne, who had fallen to the ground, and spoke.

“Did you just ask me to remove people without laying a hand on them?”

“…”

“It seems everyone can now leave through that hole over there.”

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Chapter 819

In a scene akin to a miracle, Yuder turned his head towards Duke Herne, who had fallen to the ground, and spoke.

“Did you just ask me to remove people without laying a hand on them?”

“…”

“It seems everyone can now leave through that hole over there.”

Duke Herne’s expression crumpled. People, who felt as if time had momentarily stopped, finally regained their senses and began to speak coherently, though it was mostly indistinguishable from screams.

“Move aside! Get out of the way!”

“Help me up!”

“Don’t push!”

“Protect His Highness Duke Herne! Quickly, escort him out!”

Amid the scramble to escape, the cries for help, and the private soldiers trying to protect Duke Herne, it was hard to distinguish one person from another.

The situation almost escalated into a secondary disaster due to the crowded people, but Yuder wasn’t worried. He knew they were accompanied by someone far more reliable than anyone else.

As expected, soon a crisp, clear sound reverberated from somewhere.

“Those who can move on their own, follow General Gino and his adjutant. And those who are unable to move and need assistance, stay put and raise your hands.”

The voice wasn’t particularly loud, yet it resonated in everyone’s mind, calm and commanding.

The confused crowd involuntarily turned their gaze in unison.

Kishiar La Orr, in an immaculate black evening suit, was there, clutching a sword that seemed to appear out of nowhere. The crowd was momentarily mesmerized by the soft blue glow emanating from his sword.

It was, undoubtedly, the mark of a swordmaster, along with the appearance of the rumored legendary divine sword.

“Yuder, can you maintain the current situation until everyone here has escaped?”

“Yes, even if you ask me to maintain it until sunset, there will be no problem.”

Hearing Yuder’s response, Kishiar’s lips curved upward.

“Good. When you raise your hands, First Princess Myra and I will go to those in need of help. Thanks to the presence of the strongest Awakener of the Cavalry Division, no one is hurt, and the building is safe as well. Everyone, move calmly.”

His seamless command was precisely what was needed in this situation. People realized anew that they were in the presence of not one but two precious swordmasters and an Awakener of noble status, despite his commoner origins.

Was there anywhere in the world safer than this place?

As those who had been screaming in excitement fell silent as if under a spell, the rest became obediently quiet. The voices of General Gino, his adjutant Meghna Kurlieva, and First Princess Myra became clearer.

“Everyone, this way! We will exit through the garden!”

“Be careful not to step on the broken fragments!”

“Over there! Your father is here. It seems hard for him to get up, so carry him out!”

As everyone regained their composure, their movements became significantly faster. While General Gino and Meghna gathered people toward a safe exit, the private soldiers of the Hernr family followed Myra’s instructions to protect the Duke and the women accompanying him.

Kishiar approached those who couldn’t stand and were raising their hands for help, extending his own hand to them. Those who had sprained their ankles or suffered minor injuries were surprised by the Duke’s strength, which easily helped them to their feet.

In fact, it was simply by using his abilities that Duke Peletta had lifted the people from the ground, and he was merely holding their hands to prevent them from being startled. However, those who were not Awakeners could not comprehend this extent. Everyone was unwittingly overwhelmed by the power of Duke Peletta, which was entirely different from the rumors, and by his natural ability to lead and move people.

Even those who had tried hard not to believe the rumors until the very end had to admit it. Duke Peletta was no longer the frivolous man of old perceptions. His power was real. He seemed to have been born to lead people.

Duke Herne, carried on the back of a private soldier, looked at Myra, who was nonchalantly doing what he should have done, and beyond her at Kishiar, with a frown on his face, then turned his head away. He looked completely different from when he had entered, weak and filled with anger.

During the orderly retreat, while maintaining his power, Yuder suddenly looked down at the sensation of someone tugging at the hem of his clothes.

“…What? Why haven’t you left yet?”

Kiolle, his clothes torn and dirtied, whispered urgently with his lips while sitting hunched over, trying not to attract the attention of others.

“Do you know what all this is about?! Tell me too!”

Yuder thought knowing wouldn’t change anything, but he was also an ally, though not officially, who could coordinate to prevent the dangerous individual from encountering Crown Prince Katchian. Yuder sighed softly and responded.

“It’s not certain yet, but it’s likely that the swindlers you’re talking about are outside.”

“What?!”

“There might even be someone more dangerous with them.”

“Wh-What? More dangerous?”

“At worst, they’ll just end up fighting each other here and then fall into my hands. As soon as you get out, grab Crown Prince Katchian and run. Don’t get unnecessarily involved.”

Kiolle, startled, seemed to want to say something, but Yuder didn’t have time to elaborate. He lifted his other foot, which wasn’t exerting the earth’s power, and carelessly pushed Kiolle away.

“Ah! How dare you kick me!”

“I pushed you away. Now crawl away without being noticed by others.”

It was more of a kick than a push, really.

After everyone, including Kiolle and the priests, had left, Kishiar approached Yuder, guarding Myra who had been supervising everything from behind.

“You can withdraw your power now.”

Yuder then finally withdrew all his power. The candles and lamps that were half-floating went out, rolling on the floor, and the remaining fragments

blocked by the water wall tumbled down. The vibrations that had been calmed by the earth's power began to resurge.

However, the coffin of Second Prince Ashrav, placed in the center, and the building suffered no further damage. Kishiar extended a hand and neatly swept everything away with his power.

Myra, who had been watching the scene in awe, sighed deeply and bowed her head.

"We owe you both greatly for this time as well. I sincerely thank you."

"The Princess has also had a tough time. Now we should also leave here."

"But the coffin of Ashrav is here…"

Myra's gaze lingered on her brother's lone coffin. She seemed uneasy about leaving it behind.

"Don't worry about that. I will ensure that no harm comes to it."

At Yuder's calm reply, Myra faintly smiled.

"Thank you so much. But I have no idea what has happened outside. Surely it's not the appearance of monsters?"

"No, it's not that. During the progress of the ceremony earlier, my colleagues sent signals that a dangerous individual had appeared outside."

As Yuder explained that he was able to notice the signs and prevent the shattering glass thanks to that signal, Myra's expression grew serious.

"A dangerous individual? Who might that be? Someone different from those we captured before?"

"Not exactly. They are related in some way. However, I don't believe they specifically targeted the Herne family."

Myra seemed to quickly understand the situation from his brief explanation.

“In that case, the situation must be urgent. I’ll hear the details later. Many have come for the funeral, so I must go and assist with their evacuation.”

“Isn’t that dangerous? Are you sure you’ll be alright?”

“Of course. It’s precisely what the successor of Herne should do, especially when my father is unable to move.”

Myra’s dress had become disheveled in her haste to evacuate the people. Her hat, complete with a veil, had disappeared somewhere, and her hair, which had been neatly tied up, was now half undone.

Yet, she felt genuinely at ease in that moment. Never in her life had she felt such a sense of liberation.

“Father probably has never seen his reputation damaged in such a perfectly unexpected way in his life. It’s really satisfying.”

Myra laughed heartily.

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Chapter 820

“Father probably has never seen his reputation damaged in such a perfectly unexpected way in his life. It’s really satisfying.”

Myra laughed heartily. With a relieved expression, she then made a request.

“I implore you to apprehend the uninvited guests who ruined Ashrav’s funeral. I wish I could join in the effort myself, but regretfully, I lack the strength to do so in such times.”

“Not so, Lady Myra. Do you not possess a unique power befitting a lady of your stature? The ability to effortlessly comprehend and navigate the overall situation amidst this chaos, and the capacity to maintain composure even under such circumstances.”

“That is…”

Myra trailed off, seemingly unsure of how to respond.

“This is not a situation where only one side should be asking for favors. Do not forget that we can act with ease only with the aid of the lady’s support.”

“Commander Kishiar is correct,” Yuder agreed, nodding.

“Indeed. Understood,” Myra replied, a new emotion intensifying on her face.

“Even though it might seem presumptuous, I can’t help but feel glad to hear that. I was ashamed and angry, thinking I had only shown you the disgraceful aspects of my father and our house until now.”

He had suspected as much. But it was a different matter to hear her say it herself. For the first time, Myra was laying bare her pride and speaking candidly about her own feelings.

“These experiences are not new to me. Being touted as the ‘Scion of Decades’ sounds grand, but in reality, it’s like being a pretty ornament. And no one likes an ornament stepping out in front of its master.”

“…”

“Of course, today has been exceptionally harsh, but there have been times when the internal conflict within this house was so severe, I questioned if I should continue enduring. What helped me then were the words of Her Majesty the Empress.”

Upon mentioning the Empress, Kishiar showed a reaction.

“Really? What did she say?”

“Her Majesty advised me to stay, saying that if someone capable of such contemplation remains in Herne, the shame and anger I feel now can eventually be transformed by my own efforts.”

“Hmm… Such wise words indeed befit the Empress.”

“Yes. She also joked that, by choosing my own path, I will find people who recognize and support my efforts. Since the Empress herself became my ally, that’s already one person added.”

Both Kishiar and Myra smiled simultaneously.

“Despite being forced to become an adopted daughter because of my father, she has always been a good sister to me. Her advice motivated me to strive for the title of the next Duke of Herne. And today, witnessing the shameful behavior of my father and our house, I met people who still trust in my abilities, proving her words to be true.”

Yuder suddenly recalled the first time Myra, as a member of the Herne family connected to the Empress, approached the Cavalry for collaboration.

Back then, she appeared bold and intelligent yet noticeably impatient, and somewhat inexperienced in dealing with people for negotiations.

However, the Myra before him now seemed so much more mature that it was hard to connect her with that earlier image, even though not much time had actually passed.

Even within a short span of time, people can change and grow remarkably. This truth was vividly felt through the weight of experience in her eyes.

“The people of Herne are taught to uphold the resolutions they make. Long ago, the first Duke of Herne decided to settle in the south to monitor the ancient masters who had retreated there, and to protect the people. I may not be as strong as him, but my desire to safeguard the south, where I was born and raised, is just the same.”

After saying this, Myra gracefully adjusted her disheveled dress and offered a courteous bow.

“Please, take care. I hope to see each of you return safely after completing your respective duties. Afterward, I would like to formally express my gratitude to the Cavalry.”

They reached the outside. The scene outside the chapel was utter chaos. Witnessing the panicked screams and people fleeing, Myra’s expression briefly clouded, but she quickly straightened her shoulders and called out to the bewildered soldiers of the Herne family.

“You there! As soldiers of the Herne family, what are you doing losing your composure?”

“La-Lady Myra!”

“Where have the others gone? What? They all followed my father? Unbelievable. Lead the way at once!”

“It seems that side is no longer a concern,” Kishiar remarked, brushing off his sleeves. His red eyes meticulously scanned the complex and tumultuous surroundings, while Yuder noticed a slender shadow emerging from the recently evacuated chapel.

At the end of the still wavering shadow was Gakane, rushing towards them.

“Yuder! Commander!”

Gakane’s attire and hair, which had been neat upon his arrival, were now in disarray. He exhaled a breath of relief, a shadow clone as tall as himself standing behind him.

“I’m relieved to see you’ve finally emerged. I was worried about the glass breaking, but thankfully, it seems you’re unharmed!”

“It was thanks to your continuous signals outside that Yuder was able to notice and prepare accordingly. I appreciate it.”

“Oh, no! I was just doing what I had to do.”

“It may be what one ought to do, but to actually accomplish it at the necessary moment is difficult. Seeing you grow to that extent makes me, as your Commander, proud.”

“…Th-Thank you.”

Gakane’s face flushed instantly upon receiving Kishiar’s praise. Simultaneously, the shadow clone mimicked his pose, scratching its head in embarrassment. It was a sight not seen since Gakane had become proficient in manipulating his shadow clone - the synchronized expressions of the original and the duplicate, which had seemed to disappear, reappeared amusingly, reflecting his immense joy and embarrassment.

“Gakane, the shadow.”

“Ah!”

Prompted by Yuder’s remark, Gakane quickly regained his composure and stood upright.

“Then I shall report on what happened while you were inside.”

“Which appeared first, the sage or Nahan?”

“First, the sage was… Oh.”

Interrupted by Kishiar, who seemed to anticipate his words, Gakane stopped speaking, looking flustered once again. However, this time, his expression suggested he had expected it.

“Indeed, you guessed everything from my signal alone. Then I won’t elaborate further. During our surveillance, Kurga and I spotted a suspicious individual attempting to meet with a noble. As we approached stealthily to confirm the identity, Nahan and his party appeared, and a fight ensued. Thanks to that, we were immediately able to confirm that the suspicious individual was indeed the sage.”

“The sage’s side must have been significantly outnumbered compared to Nahan’s, right?”

“Yes, it wasn’t just a few; in fact, the sage appeared alone, completely concealing his identity. At first, it was hard to distinguish him. Nevertheless, Nahan recognized him immediately, despite his disguised state.”

“Hmm. So, what happened then?”

At Kishiar’s inquiry, Gakane replied with a serious expression.

“The sage loudly called for help, and we, along with the Special Forces Brigade, set out to apprehend both parties. It was utter chaos. The fleeing crowd, the useless soldiers of the Herne family, people from the temple, and even someone claiming to be of the imperial lineage got involved. It was difficult to fight while ensuring the non-Awakeners remained unharmed.”

Someone claiming to be of the imperial lineage.

The identity was quite guessable. It was all thanks to Kiolle.

‘I told him to run away as soon as he got out… but it seems everything had already ended without the need for that.’

Where could Kiolle be now? He turned his gaze toward the commotion unfolding in the distance, but it was hard to discern anyone in the crowd.

“So it was like that. Did the one claiming to be of the imperial lineage say he was the Crown Prince?”

Kishiar’s narrowed eyes prompted Gakane to widen his own.

“How did you…? Wait, don’t tell me that person is actually…?”

“He really is the Crown Prince. I personally confirmed it with the guy we brought in, right inside the chapel.”

At this, Gakane blinked in disbelief, then gasped, swallowing hard.

“What do we do? Everyone, including me, thought it was a ploy by the sage, using mind control on someone… As soon as that person stepped forward, I hit him on the back of the head and separated him from the rest…”

“You hit him on the back of the head? You did, Gakane?”

“Yes, well, it was probably my shadow clone… It’s quite useful for that sort of thing….?”

“…”

“But that person, or rather, he had his face covered with a robe, so I couldn’t guess his identity… I naturally thought he was a brainwashed impostor… What do we do now? If he wakes up, will I be arrested for striking a member of the imperial family?”

“Don’t worry. Nothing like that will happen,” Kishiar assured with a smile, comforting the distressed Gakane.

“With me here, would a Cavalry member really be arrested for such a minor incident?”

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Chapter 821

“Don’t worry. Nothing like that will happen,” Kishiar assured with a smile, comforting the distressed Gakane.

“With me here, would a member of my Cavalry really be arrested for such a minor incident?”

In truth, Gakane’s judgment wasn’t entirely off. The issue was that their opponent was not a brainwashed impostor, but a brainwashed real Crown Prince.

“Who would have believed him to be the Crown Prince in that situation? It was a good decision to quickly separate him from the dangerous scene as he was a non-Awakener, unable to properly perceive his surroundings due to brainwashing. It was nothing more than acting according to the Cavalry’s training.”

“Well, that is true, but…”

“Even if I were there, I might have acted the same, or perhaps, even more harshly subdued him. So, it was a very moderate judgment. If anything, you deserve praise.”

In fact, such a statement was somewhat unusual for the usually composed Kishiar. Their Cavalry Commander was never known for rough actions in any situation. He was always efficient, preferring an elegant style of combat that effortlessly brought down opponents with minimal effort, and he certainly had the skill to spare.

However, Kishiar was smiling so brilliantly that it clouded the minds of those who saw it, preventing Gakane from thinking too deeply about it.

“Having heard that from the Commander, I feel a bit relieved… Haha.”

“Rather than a bit, you should be completely at ease. Even if the Crown Prince wakes up and tries to find out who did this, he won’t be able to find the culprit. You’ve done well enough that I don’t regret not arriving sooner. Let’s talk more about this once today’s ordeal is over.”

Kishiar lightly patted Gakane’s shoulder, followed by Yuder, who, breaking his usual silence since the incident of hitting the Crown Prince, touched and then removed his hand from the other shoulder.

“You’ve done well.”

Kishiar was a superior who was already known for kindly addressing his members. However, this was usually in the form of gentle advice, delicately discerning and informing about improvements in skills or mindset, not such lavish praise.

Yuder was the complete opposite of such a leader. In the Cavalry, there was a joke that the only beings never to receive criticism from his keen eyes were the cat Nipolen and Commander Kishiar. Gakane, who had received more personal training from him than anyone, knew very well how coldly rational he was in his acknowledgments and judgments.

That both of these men simultaneously acknowledged and praised Gakane Bolunwald was enough to make him feel like he could forget all his troubles.

The faces of the southern nobles who had been unpleasantly commenting on his appearance just moments ago, his body in disarray from running and rolling around in the slushy snow, and the anxiety he felt while trying to alert the inside of the chapel to the emergency situation-all of it seemed to melt away from his mind.

‘Indeed, I love the Cavalry. I’m really glad I chose to be in the Cavalry and not a knight!’

Even if it was because he unknowingly hit the back of the Crown Prince’s head hard, what of it?

“If Commander and Yuder think it’s fine, then there’s no problem. Even if there is… now it doesn’t seem to matter anymore!”

Gakane Bolunwald had long since adopted the mindset of a fine member of the Cavalry.

“So, right now, are Kurga and Sunz still dealing with those guys over there?”

Lost in his emotions, Gakane quickly regained his focus at Yuder’s question and nodded rapidly.

“To be precise, Nahan and the sage were both engaged in a fierce battle, unleashing their powers against each other. During this conflict, they were both endlessly hostile towards us. We were trying to contain the damage caused by their abilities, preventing it from spreading to the non-Awakeners. This was our plan until you and the Commander’s arrival.”

According to Gakane, the sage, though alone, had managed to brainwash a few of Nahan’s comrades to switch sides. Additionally, the sage used some noble non-Awakeners that he initially intended to contact as shields in his resistance.

It was truly remarkable how, in such a short time, he had demonstrated such formidable brainwashing abilities.

“They seem to think that each other is in a cooperative relationship with us, but there’s no need to correct their misunderstanding,” Gakane noted.

However, even for skilled Cavalry members like Gakane and Kuraga, directly confronting Nahan and the sage was perilous. Gakane, having already had a bitter experience when they crossed paths in the capital, knew this all too well.

Therefore, Gakane made a much more calculated decision this time.

He resolved not to overestimate his own strength. Prioritizing the safety of his comrades and those around him, he calmed anyone overly agitated.

They also moved cunningly to prevent the enemy from detecting their actions.

“So, we prioritized holding out and maintaining communication until the evacuation was complete and you and the Commander arrived. As long as we can keep both sides from escaping until then, everything should work out,” he explained.

This was indeed an excellent judgment, aside from the fact that he had struck the Crown Prince and forced him to be evacuated.

Despite his successes, Gakane felt embarrassed that he had failed to prevent a window from shattering due to an ability launched by one of Nahan’s followers, while he was signaling the chapel.

“Ah, but compared to the sage, Nahan seemed in a worse state than in the capital,” Gakane observed.

“Do you mean his injuries looked more severe?” Yuder asked.

“There’s that too, and… well, how should I put it?”

Gakane, with a troubled expression, carefully chose his next words.

“I thought that as soon as Nahan appeared, he would immediately use his powers on the sage and the other non-Awakeners. But instead, he just watched as his comrades pressured the sage. It was as if he knew that was a more effective way to corner the sage.”

“…”

“Uh… Honestly, he looked so bad, it wouldn’t be surprising if he dropped dead… Maybe it’s vengeance that’s keeping him going.”

Gakane frowned and shrugged slightly. The mere thought seemed to send shivers down his spine. Then, as if suddenly remembering something, he added, “Ah, speaking of which, there was someone strange among Nahan’s group.”

“Strange person?”

“Not as much as the sage, but an older-looking person… I feel like I’ve seen him somewhere… He was an Awakener who seemed to have difficulty moving, but he was right by Nahan’s side. Or perhaps, he was being held captive?”

Gakane, overwhelmed, couldn’t recall further details.

An older-looking Awakener who seemed familiar.

And the sage, who appeared alone.

Yuder, feeling an odd sense of deja vu, remained silent.

‘Hmm… Could it be?’

Just then, another loud explosion came from the direction of the battle, snapping Yuder’s drifting mind back into sharp focus.

Yuder, realizing that this was not the time to continue the conversation, immediately turned his head. His gaze met with Kishiar’s, whose red eyes seemed to have been waiting for this moment.

He knew that as long as Kishiar was there, there was no need to worry about what lay behind. It had always been so.

In the relaxed eyes of his counterpart, Yuder could see a level of trust matching his own.

He had felt it before, when facing monsters raining down from the sky - a strange, reassuring, and unfamiliar feeling.

“Commander. Please give your order. Where shall we start?”

Kishiar said, with a cool yet affectionate smile.

“Nahan and the sage. Both, coincidentally, are troublesome mental-type Awakeners. But I have some regrets about the one who slipped through my

fingers last time.”

This meant that Kishiar wanted to confront Nahan.

Knowing how formidable Nahan’s abilities were, Yuder felt a twinge of concern, but he quickly shook it off.

“Understood. I’ll capture the sage first.”

“That was quick.”

While receiving Gakane’s report, a blue aura began to rise along the blade of Kishiar’s sword, which had been momentarily dim. Simultaneously, a golden light flickered in one of Yuder’s eyes, eagerly anticipating the upcoming battle, baring his teeth in a ferocious grin.

The two of them, without regard for who led, rushed towards the site of the battle. Gakane followed, leading a shadowy procession, guarding the surroundings.

At the same time, at the rear entrance of the chaotic temple, First Princess Myra, busy directing the soldiers, spotted someone struggling to enter amidst the fleeing crowd.

The person seemed to be injured, limping. It was odd that instead of escaping the temple, he was trying to get back in. Myra immediately grabbed and turned the person around.

“Hey! Didn’t you hear that you’re not supposed to go in?”

The skinny man flinched and turned around in surprise. It was then that Myra realized he was a foreigner from the southern lands.

“Are you a worker at the temple? Or a servant of someone inside?”

“I, I am…”

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Chapter 822

“Are you a worker at the temple? Or a servant of someone inside?”

“I, I am…”

The man stammered and averted his gaze from Myra, bowing his head. Upon closer inspection, he was drenched in cold sweat. Myra frowned at his appearance, looking as if he was on the verge of collapsing, exhausted from wandering around.

“If you are someone’s servant, declare your allegiance, and if you work in the temple…”

“Oh, no, no. I am not. I am….!”

The man shook his head and stumbled back.

“I, I am…..”

Myra saw fear and terror in his fleeting gaze and was gripped by curiosity.

‘What is this? It’s not just fatigue… he is afraid of me?’

Myra was perceptive. Even in a tense situation, she could distinguish whether the person before her feared a strange noble or specifically feared her.

It was common for ordinary citizens and servants to fear any noble, but the fear directed at Myra herself felt unusual.

‘Have I seen this man somewhere before?’

Narrowing her eyes, Myra stared intently at the unfamiliar face of the young man from the southern lands.

‘It seems like I’m seeing him for the first time…’

Thinking about it, it seemed unlikely that a noble would bring such an ordinary-looking southerner as a servant to Ashrav's funeral. Could this man be the servant of the deceased Ashrav, related to the merchant who was said to be behind him?

In that case, it made sense why he was terrified upon seeing Myra.

At that moment, as Myra's gaze sharpened in front of the frozen young man.

"Damn it! Of all days, Duke Herne's carriage wheel breaks!"

"Fetch a new wheel! Or someone to fix it!"

"Lady Yellen is fighting again with other young ladies over the issue with the Second Prince!"

'What? Father's carriage broke down?'

Distracted by the shouts nearby, Myra felt a strange sense of foreboding from those words.

Duke Herne, her father. Madame Yellen, Ashrav's mother. The young ladies.

And the southern young man, hunched over as if guilty of some crime.

Sometimes, people find commonalities between seemingly unrelated elements. For Myra, this was one of those moments.

'Yes, I've seen this attitude, these eyes before… because of my father.'

Duke Herne, always surrounded by women since Myra's birth.

Despite being the head of a prestigious ducal family, his unchaste behavior was often excused as a necessity due to the short lifespans in their family.

But to Myra, these were mere excuses. If the goal was to produce many heirs while alive, it should have been through his lawful wife. However, the

women her father involved himself with were not only his wife but also varied in age and social status.

Even the young ladies he brought recently were not only nobles' daughters but also merchants', mages', knights', and even commoners'. Lady Yellen, Ashrav's mother, also came from a declined baronet family in the south, having Ashrav out of wedlock before marrying and divorcing before Ashrav turned one.

Ashrav, who was at least recognized as a legitimate son, was considered fortunate. Duke Herne, known for his numerous dalliances with women, had countless unacknowledged bastards. It was doubtful if even he knew the exact number.

Some of these bastards were at least recognized to the extent that they received help to survive. However, those who did not inherit any of Herne family's distinctive traits were not even that fortunate and lived miserably, unaware of their father's identity.

Legitimate children like Myra often had to deal with problems caused by these bastards, especially when it seemed like the family might get entangled. After all, these were their half-siblings and potential competitors or scandals for the family, so it was better they handled these matters themselves rather than entrusting them to unreliable subordinates.

Myra's elder brothers, still alive at that time, had never shown any sympathy towards these bastards. However, Myra always felt a pang in her heart when she saw these unrecognized children, as their plight didn't seem much different from her own.

During the time when Emperor Keilusa was still the Crown Prince, Duke Herne had temporarily adopted a distant relative's daughter for the position of Crown Princess, solely because there was no suitable daughter in the Herne family with the appropriate age and their signature platinum hair. The girl's own wishes were completely disregarded in this process, and Myra, despite being a legitimate daughter, also faced disdain for not being useful to the family, even though the timing of her birth was beyond her control.

Duke Herne viewed his legitimate children, bastards, and even his precious daughter, born after decades, as no different from objects. Myra deeply felt this harsh reality, appalled at how one man's recognition could instantly alter a person's life and status. Therefore, she secretly took care to ensure that the bastards she met did not suffer mistreatment.

Among the many bastards, there was one who, despite not inheriting the Herne family's physical traits, was peculiarly well cared for, even having a servant assigned to him. The existence of this bastard was kept hidden, manipulated through other nobles, and Myra only learned about him much later.

What she knew about him was limited. He was a son, probably older than herself. He lived out of sight, not venturing outside, but he had tutors and even a personal servant.

Myra felt compelled to understand why this particular bastard received such unusual treatment. Her investigation led her to suspect the reason.

The bastard was of mixed heritage, likely with someone from the southern countries. Duke Herne had briefly engaged in trade with the South in his youth, and he was often accompanied by a woman of considerable status from there. Although finding information after so long was challenging, rumors persisted that she bore Herne's child. Not long after, Herne completely withdrew from the southern trade.

For the Herne family, a prestigious noble house guarding the southern part of the empire, the fact that Duke Herne fathered a child with a southern woman was a scandal that could upheave the entire empire. It was a wonder the child wasn't killed immediately after birth.

Myra decided she needed to find out where the bastard was and sought out the noble who seemed to be in charge of him. The noble was taken aback by her visit, but upon hearing the information she had gathered, he sighed as if there was no helping it.

"Little Lady. Why does it matter so much?"

“What do you mean?”

“He doesn’t even know who he is. Officially, he grew up in a villa owned by my family, so in the worst case, if someone finds out, they’ll think he’s my bastard. He thinks the same, and in case of any eventuality, I’ve made sure he can’t even speak a word about the Herne family. It’s impossible for anyone to guess who he is.”

“But isn’t it better to send him back to the South rather than keep him imprisoned like this? What on earth is my father thinking?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he plans to use him as a link to the South once he grows up. If that’s not feasible, then there’s nothing to be done.”

What kind of reasoning is that? To lock away and hide a person just for a ‘maybe’ seems absurd. Even if he wanted to hide a potential scandal, this is treating a person like an object. Myra knew her father’s nature, but this realization still took her breath away.

“This is not right. Just send him back to the South. It’s better for him, especially if he doesn’t even know he’s of our bloodline.”

Despite Myra’s insistence, the noble dismissed her concerns, suggesting that her visit was more harmful than helpful, and turned her away.

As Myra was being turned away, she caught a glimpse of a skinny Southern boy cautiously entering the door. Initially startled, thinking he might be the bastard, she realized he looked more like a servant.

“Could he be the bastard’s servant?”

Considering they specifically employed a Southern boy, it was a possibility.

“You there.”

Myra called out to him, but the boy, startled upon making eye contact, was terrified and mumbled something in his native Southern language before running away.

“Aaaah!”

Myra returned home, deeply shaken by the look in the boy’s eyes, which regarded her as some kind of monster. She planned to follow up, but the opportunity never presented itself.

A few days later, the noble and his family disappeared as if they had evaporated.

Myra could no longer find any traces of the bastard or learn more about her father’s past. Her father continued living as he always had, and her few legitimate brothers died one after another at a young age for no apparent reason. As her brothers passed away, the weight on Myra’s shoulders grew heavier with the many responsibilities she had to shoulder, causing her to gradually forget about that day.

However, the moment she saw the Southern young man before her now, the memories and feelings of that day resurfaced.

The image of the skinny Southern boy servant from her memories slowly overlapped with the young man in front of her.

“You…”

Just as Myra was about to speak, another explosion resounded behind her. It was as loud as when the giant temple windows had shattered, causing people to scream again.

“Ah!”

Startled, Myra stumbled, and the Southern young man regained his senses and fled. After a moment, he started to run towards the inside of the temple.

No. Just as he seemed to be running away, he suddenly vanished from sight.

“Wait…! Stop there!”

“First Princess! Are you alright?”

The one who caught and supported the shouting Myra was General Gino.

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Chapter 823

“Wait…! Stop there!”

“First Princess! Are you alright?”

The one who caught and supported the shouting Myra was General Gino. Although Myra managed to stand upright again, leaning on his arm, her gaze remained fixed on the spot where the young man from the southern country had disappeared, unable to move.

“Oh no… Her body has completely stiffened. Someone come and escort the First Princess to the carriage!”

“No…! No, General. I am fine.”

General Gino seemed to have concluded that Myra was not in a good state due to the harsh weather and her overexertion. However, Myra shook her head and pushed away the General’s arm.

“Rather than that, I think I need to go inside for a moment.”

“Returning inside with the sleet getting worse, what has happened?”

There had been an incident. A figure from her past had suddenly appeared and then vanished into the temple. But how could she convey to General Gino the family’s disgrace and her childhood memories, the evidence lacking but the certainty felt in that brief moment?

“I saw a suspicious person take advantage of the recent chaos to go inside. He disappeared suddenly… I think I need to go and look for him and inform the others inside.”

“What on earth… Calm down and explain more clearly. Are you saying that we need to inform His Grace, Duke Peletta, because a suspicious person

appeared? If that’s the case, you can just describe his appearance. I will send a reliable subordinate.”

“But that’s…”

“General! Someone from the Cavalry has come!”

At that moment, someone shouted from behind the two. It was Meghna Kurlieva, General Gino’s adjutant.

“The Cavalry? Support has arrived already without contact?”

“No. They did not come in response to a call! It appears a criminal under the protection of the Cavalry has escaped. It’s urgent, and they request a meeting with His Grace, Duke Peletta, and his assistant immediately!”

“What?”

“Is the criminal from the southern country?! Someone with the ability to disappear suddenly?”

Startled, General Gino was pushed aside as Myra quickly shouted. Meghna was taken aback by the sudden question from the First Princess but soon composed her expression and nodded.

“I’m not sure how you knew… Yes, that’s correct. The escaped criminal is a southern man with the ability to move instantaneously.”

At that moment, Myra was certain that the figure she had seen was not a hallucination.

“That’s him! The suspicious person I saw earlier!”

Upon hearing Myra’s outcry, General Gino immediately called the member from the Cavalry. The member, with a stern face, introduced herself as Yergin Schiller.

“I came in a hurry to see the Commander because of the escaped criminal, and I was surprised to hear that entry was denied. May I ask what happened

during the funeral ceremony?”

“A fight broke out among the intruders outside. They are all presumed to be Awakeners, and the situation has become so severe that it has affected the chapel. We are currently evacuating everyone except for the Cavalry and our forces.”

“And I saw the escaped criminal just now, blending in with the evacuating people and entering inside.”

General Gino and Myra took turns answering. After hearing that all these responses were under the command of Duke Peletta, Yergin took a deep breath.

“I suppose I am a step behind. Still, it’s a relief that you encountered the escaped criminal without any major incident. I will immediately contact the Cavalry to call back all the dispersed members for the search.”

“If you came to report, do you not need to go inside immediately?”

“From what I hear, it seems the Commander has already figured out the identity of those who invaded and started the fight. I don’t think it will be too late to go after contacting the members. If the criminal went somewhere else, it might be different, but if he’s gone in there, it’s probably he who’s in danger, not the Commander.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. Isn’t assistant Yuder Aile with the Commander?”

“That’s true, but…”

“Then there’s no need to worry.”

“…”

“I’ll just use the signal flares twice. That should be enough.”

Hearing Yergin’s calm and absolute confidence, General Gino wore a perplexed expression, unsure of how to respond.

Of course, having the empire’s new swordmaster, who slaughtered the rain of monsters, and the hero of the West together provided a sense of security, but worry was a separate matter. Even the strongest can’t win every battle perfectly, because there are always variables in the world.

Shouldn’t she be aware of that? Yet, was she really not worried at all?

Was this the attitude of the entire Cavalry, or was it just this member? Has he grown too old to keep up with the young generation’s vigor?

The veteran General glanced at Myra, seeking a fellow sympathizer. However, she was deep in conflict about whether to tell Yergin that she knew Hosanna, nearly letting their conversation go in one ear and out the other.

‘Considering that the criminal ran away upon seeing me, perhaps he didn’t come to this place today targeting the Herne family. But could there really be no connection at all? Really?’

Especially today, at Ashrav’s funeral. Could she ignore the fact that she met him here, at this moment, as if it had nothing to do with her?

As she pondered, Yergin lit the two signal flares she had taken out. General Gino, who had worried that the fire might not catch properly due to the sleet, admired how the warm wind from her hands quickly fueled the flames.

“Truly the work of the Cavalry.”

“My abilities are nothing exceptional compared to Yuder.”

Though the standard was set by Yuder alone, not the other members, General Gino couldn’t comprehend that far.

Shortly after, the signal flares shot high into the sky and exploded one after the other. The first was a yellow flame, the second red. Both signal flares,

with their presence visible and audible from afar, disappeared after a short while. Not long after, four figures suddenly appeared.

It was Hinn Eldore, Finn Eldore, and in their hands, they held Ever Beck and Kanna Wand.

General Gino and Meghna Kurlieva were startled to see four people suddenly appear out of nowhere, but the Cavalry members exchanged greetings and brief introductions before conversing as if it was nothing out of the ordinary.

“Ever, Kanna, you’re the first to arrive. Then you’ve heard the story.”

“We heard Hosanna escaped. Did you find him here?”

Kanna asked quickly, her face unusually stern.

“The First Princess saw him entering inside.”

Ever and Kanna did not ask for more details. After glancing at the evacuating people and the chaotic scene inside the temple walls, Ever looked at Kanna with a grave expression, to which she silently nodded.

“…It seems likely that the sage and Nahan’s party are inside as well. It’s just like the information I read in the warehouse earlier. I never expected Hosanna to be here too…”

“…”

“I’m sorry, everyone. If only I hadn’t been so careless when I left Hosanna behind…”

“No, Kanna. How is that your fault? It’s because of us!”

“It’s our fault for being so preoccupied, Finn and I.”

Hinn and Finn countered Kanna’s apology, their expressions just as troubled.

It was surprisingly Ever, with the sternest face of all, who put an end to their gloomy conversation.

“Let’s stop this. If we go by that logic, then I’m the most to blame for calling busy Kanna in the first place. But, figuring out who’s most at fault here and now won’t change anything.”

“…”

“We should save our apologies for later, once everything’s over, and plead with the Commander. For now, in this unresolved situation, we should set aside all other thoughts and focus on what we need to do.”

Everyone fell silent at her firm tone, a departure from her usual polite speech.

After a moment, Kanna nodded and clenched her fist.

“You’re right. Sorry, I won’t say anything else from now on.”

Having said that, she looked around and then stopped her gaze on Myra.

“So, First Princess, you met Hosanna. Right?”

“Ugh…”

“The escaped criminal’s name is Hosanna. He seemed to know who you were from before, First Princess. And now, it looks like you know who he is as well. Am I wrong?”

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Chapter 824

“The escaped criminal’s name is Hosanna. He seemed to know who you were from before, First Princess. And now, it looks like you know who he is as well. Am I wrong?”

At Kanna’s words, Myra blinked in surprise.

“How could you know that… No. I guess such questions are meaningless to you.”

The short-haired woman before her appeared to be a girl who knew nothing of fighting, but in reality, she was one of the Deputy Commanders of the Cavalry. Myra vividly remembered how Yuder had mentioned Kanna Wand’s deceptive strength, contrary to her unassuming appearance.

While her exact abilities were unknown, anything could happen here. This thought brought calm to Myra’s mind.

“Yes, that’s right. I remembered having seen that person before, just a while ago.”

Kanna’s eyes sharpened at Myra’s response.

“I need to talk with the First Princess a bit longer. The rest of you, go ahead.”

“Understood. I’ll leave the support arrangements to you.”

The Cavalry members quickly divided their tasks and leaped towards the interior.

Myra watched them and then quietly asked Kanna.

“Is my story about that criminal… really that important in this situation?”

“Yes, it’s important not only to us but also to the Herne family,” Kanna replied without hesitation.

“The criminal seen by the princess is closely related to another dangerous criminal we’ve been pursuing for a long time. And that person is now inside here too.”

“…”

“To confront an enemy, one must thoroughly understand them. Our Commander has been constantly seeking information about these individuals. And now, I believe I can obtain some answers from you, First Princess.”

“But all I know is…”

“Weren’t there some words spoken secretly to you by our Commander at the funeral earlier? Do you remember?”

“…That was…”

Myra’s eyes widened. Kanna was right. Just before the funeral officially began, while she was talking with Kishiar, he had casually mentioned something to her.

‘He asked about the lord of Conkachista, the recent happenings there, and the fire incident. He said it might be related to the person they’re pursuing… I was planning to discuss it in detail after the ceremony…’

“That question must be related to Hosanna. We believe Hosanna and another criminal whom he followed were people who had been imprisoned in that place for a long time and had escaped. To be precise, he was a bastard son born of a noble and his servant.”

Myra felt her breath stop.

The imprisoned bastard son and his servant.

Wasn’t that the very story she had just been contemplating?

“Hosanna had a double oath placed on him to prevent him from speaking of his origins, a powerful, illegal double oath. We couldn’t get more information because of that, but we suspect that the place where they were confined is related to the Herne family.”

“A double… oath…”

Myra had never seen such an oath in person, but she knew the nobles often secretly obtained them for unspeakable, secretive affairs.

And she also knew how horrific the consequences could be.

“In preparation for any eventuality, I have placed an oath on him so he cannot even utter a word about the Herne family. No one can guess who he is,” the nobleman from the distant past had said, driving Myra out with an indifferent face and voice. Suddenly, a chill ran down her spine, and Myra squeezed her eyes shut and then opened them again.

The young man from the southern country, who, despite his limping leg, had started to run away as soon as he saw her.

Thinking about his connection to today’s funeral now seemed foolish.

The fact that her father’s forgotten bastard son was here, and that the chapel’s glass had shattered during the funeral, felt like divine retribution upon the Herne ducal family.

Kanna was right. The information they were about to share would undoubtedly be important to both the Herne family and the Cavalry.

“I’m beginning to believe… that the criminals the Cavalry is searching for are indeed the ones I know,” Myra murmured with a pale face, clasping her hands tightly.

“Long ago, I learned that my father had a bastard son of southern descent. I don’t know much, but every detail I remember matches exactly what you’ve said,” Myra conveyed all she knew to Kanna. She suppressed the reluctance

and shame of voicing her family's disgrace deep within her heart. In return, she heard from Kanna about a man named 'Nahan' and the life he had led.

He was practically a monster born from the sins committed by the Duke of Herne and those who knew yet did nothing to stop him.

Had there ever been a day when she despised being born in Herne this much?

After exchanging information, Myra turned without hesitation and ran towards where the Duke of Herne was.

The chaos from before, combined with the sleet, had left many carriages in disarray.

Among them, the Duke of Herne's carriage stood askew, its wheel off. The drenched servants and soldiers were in disarray, shouting until they spotted Myra and cried out in surprise.

"First Princess? His Grace the Duke is currently…!"

"Move aside."

Myra strode determinedly towards the carriage she did not wish to approach, gripping her garment so tightly her hand turned white.

By right, the Duke of Herne should have been responsible for any incidents at Ashrav's funeral. Yet, the Duke was safely hidden inside the carriage, while the Cavalry and Duke Peletta struggled to manage the situation.

Even this moment, spoiled by the sins that led to the birth of his other son, was his doing.

As Myra pulled open the carriage door, a wave of hot air hit her. Inside, the Duke of Herne, his eyes downcast in boredom, and a half-naked woman atop him turned their heads with heated eyes.

The woman was Lady Yellen, Ashrav's mother, who had spent the ceremony shedding tears and wailing.

“How dare you, First Princess!”

“Is this appropriate behavior at your son’s funeral?”

Before Lady Yellen could retort, Myra raised her hand with cold eyes.

“Leave.”

Lady Yellen involuntarily shrank under Myra’s gaze. For the first time, the First Princess she had watched grow up seemed terrifying. Trying not to show her cowering, she grumbled loudly, but her fearful eyes betrayed her. As Lady Yellen straightened her clothes and left, the Duke of Herne asked.

“What is it?”

“…”

“Do you plan to join forces with Peletta and try something?”

“Father, do you remember that among your many children, there was a man born of a southern woman?”

The question was sudden, but the Duke of Herne answered without fluster.

“Well, I don’t consider bastards as my children. And as of today, all my sons have perished and are in the arms of God.”

“I see. That man is here now. Do you have anything you would like to say to him?”

“What strange things you say. That can’t be.”

“Why? Because you burned him to death?”

At Myra’s retort, the Duke of Herne frowned.

“Where did you hear such a thing…,”

“Father. I no longer care whether you choose me as your successor or not. I don’t want to live striving for your recognition anymore. So, although you might not like it… I have decided not to just stand by and watch you leave in this carriage today, despite the name of Herne. That’s why I came here.”

“What?”

“The head of the Herne family must stay here until everything is settled. That’s the least we can do for everyone working hard here. If you won’t do anything, at least watch.”

Myra stepped out of the carriage. The soldiers looked at her with anxious eyes.

She scanned them and found the knights of Herne loyal to her.

During her rivalry with Ashrav, Myra had naturally gathered her own people. They might not have wielded much power within the Herne family, but in terms of pure skill, they were among the best soldiers.

Myra, who had called upon those who couldn’t guard the inside of the chapel during today’s funeral due to their lower rank, issued her command in a cool voice.

“Seal off this carriage immediately. Herne will fully support the Cavalry and the Imperial Army until today’s matters are resolved. Until then, no one from the Herne family shall leave.”

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Chapter 825

“Seal off this carriage immediately. Herne will fully support the Cavalry and the Imperial Army until today’s matters are resolved. Until then, no one from the Herne family shall leave.”

Amidst the murmuring of the soldiers, Duke Herne erupted into laughter, seemingly incredulous.

“Oh dear, Myra, it seems I’ve allowed you to grow up not fully understanding your place. I am the head of this family. Do you think it’s possible to restrain the head with just a few soldiers? And even if you manage to hold your ground, what difference does it make?”

“It makes a difference. A great deal.”

With those words, Myra gazed down at her father with a cold look in her eyes.

“It makes a difference when the one who should bear responsibility does not turn away. You might not understand, always staying in the background.”

During her journey here, after speaking with Kanna, Myra contemplated Duke Herne, the man she called father, and the image she had of him.

Duke Herne, belonging to one of the four great Ducal families interwoven with history, was unique in rarely staying at the family’s main residence in the capital. His nominal reasons were health recuperation and focusing on the south, but this was somewhat incomprehensible.

Previous Dukes of Herne, due to short lifespans and health issues inherited through generations, often recuperated in the south. However, none spent as much time secluded in their own space as the current Duke. Nor was he particularly involved in caring for the south.

Duke Herne always maintained a step back in all matters. Observing from a distance, seemingly uninvolved, he would unexpectedly deliver a striking remark at the least anticipated moments.

His method of handling everything cunningly and ambiguously, yet selfishly, was evident during the selection of Crown Princess for Keilusa, where he pushed a candidate from another family to secure his own gains.

People were always fearful of his unpredictability. Myra too once believed there must be some reason behind it.

As the number of early deaths in Herne increased, it seemed natural that the Duke would focus on preparing a successor. People thought that doing this well was sufficient for a Duke of Herne. Myra tried to believe this, despite her dislike for her father, remembering she must earn his recognition to become his heir.

She had always suppressed her desire to resolve every issue herself, considering it a reflection of her inexperience and immaturity.

However, meeting visitors in the south and experiencing many events, Myra started to see clearly what had always troubled her.

Duke Peletta Kishiar La Orr resolved the southern issues Duke Herne had long ignored in just a few days by confronting them directly. He was not ashamed to take action himself. The mere presence of a responsible leader changed many things.

Duke Herne could have done the same, but he chose not to. Not for any profound reason. Myra coldly realized that her father simply turned his back on every problem, hiding in safety, fulfilling only his own desires.

Was there any reason to admire someone who has never stepped forward for anything?

Myra thought of her father, that man, as nothing more than a coward.

Unlike Duke Herne, who did not favor Myra's approach, Duke Peletta had fully made Myra realize through their cooperation that her way was not at all clumsy, that she was capable of moving the entire south.

How shocking and astonishing this realization was, no one could possibly know.

The power held by Duke Herne, the head of the family, was indeed tremendous.

However, it was Myra who had tirelessly worked for the people of the south over the past years, truly representing 'Herne'.

To Duke Herne, Myra might have been just a regrettable tool, unused and lucky to survive, now audaciously eyeing his position. But to most people in the south, Myra was dearly loved. And she had always strived to respond to the love they had shown her.

Even those who disliked her had to admit that she had worked hard enough to be considered a legitimate contender for the next Duke, dedicating herself to the south.

The time had come to show the weight of what she had built herself.

Standing atop the steps descending from the carriage, Myra surveyed her surroundings. In addition to the people from the Herne Family, many others had not yet left.

Most of them were ordinary people from the south, who had come heartbroken at the news of the death of the son of House Herne. They had come to pay their respects, unaware of the chaos that would unfold, and now, unable to leave, stood enduring the pelting sleet, their hearts heavy with the unfinished funeral.

Those who couldn't even enter the chapel for the ceremony, of too low status to offer condolence money, had come to pray for the deceased.

Myra raised her voice to address them.

“Brave souls who love the blue seas and harsh deserts of the south, I am Myra El Herne, the First Princess of Herne. I know many of you were startled by the sudden events that interrupted the funeral of the Second Prince Ashrav earlier.”

“Is that Lady Myra, the First Princess?”

“It’s true! It’s the First Princess. I saw her once before.”

“What is she saying?”

At first, her shouts were muffled by the sleet. But as the murmuring crowd quieted, Myra’s voice began to resonate and spread more powerfully.

“Currently, the Cavalry, His Highness Duke Peletta, and many others are working hard to prevent further incidents and to handle the intruders. I, as well as His Highness Duke Herne here, will naturally join in this effort.”

“Myra…!”

Duke Herne, seated in the carriage, called out her name sharply from behind, but she did not stop speaking.

“We will stay here until everything is resolved and Ashrav’s funeral is completely concluded. I promise to do everything possible to ensure that no one is harmed or killed, to honor Ashrav’s final journey.”

Her disheveled hair fluttered in the wind. Her black mourning clothes, stained and torn, might have seemed unsightly, but those watching her didn’t feel they were dirty or shabby.

In that moment, she was the true heir of a family representing the south.

“However, we need your help to do this. To ensure that Ashrav’s funeral does not end in loneliness or get interrupted midway, please stay and watch over us to the end. Lend us your small acts of attention and help for a swift resolution!”

As Myra’s impassioned plea came to an end, a brief silence fell. However, this silence was not filled with a cold air.

Soon after, a tremendous wave of support and shouts erupted around the carriages of House Hern.

“We will help!”

“What can we do?”

“How can we leave first, knowing all that the First Princess has done for Charloin! That would be absurd.”

Most of the ordinary mourners hardly knew why they had been evacuated in the first place. But now, there was no longer any sense of unease.

The previously chaotic atmosphere had suddenly become orderly, filled with a peculiar fervor. The people of the south had never before seen the entire House of Herne taking direct action in such incidents, and they were much more encouraged by this fact than they had expected.

Myra, looking at the cheering crowd, turned her head. She smiled slightly at her father, who was staring at her blankly, an unreadable expression on his face.

“Weren’t you the one who said a few soldiers couldn’t hold you back?”

“…”

“Now, you can’t leave, can you? Watch and see what I do.”

In a usual situation, Duke Herne’s words might have overturned Myra’s influence, as they had earlier. But not this time. The ordinary people outside, while plain, were also the entirety of the south that supported House Hern.

At the moment Duke Herne’s face contorted, Myra didn’t wait for a response and closed the carriage door. She swiftly descended the steps and ran towards General Gino and Kanna in the distance.

“The situation outside will soon be under control. Let us know if there’s more that Herne can do to help!”

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At the same time, outside the temple where many had evacuated.

Kiolle da Diarca sat hidden in a secluded corner, clutching his head in agonizing pain.

“Why… why do I have to go through this here…?”

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Chapter 826

At the same time, outside the temple where many had evacuated.

Kiolle da Diarca sat hidden in a secluded corner, clutching his head in agonizing pain.

“Why… why do I have to go through this here…?”

It was a day when nothing went right. As per Yuder’s advice, he had attempted to find the Crown Prince and flee, but the Crown Prince’s expected location was eerily vacant. Despite Kiolle’s repeated instructions to stay put until his return, the Crown Prince had blatantly disregarded his words.

Normally, he would delegate the task of finding someone to his subordinates. But now, that was impossible. Since arriving in the south, Kiolle had abandoned even the other Imperial Knights who should have accompanied him, all to keep the Crown Prince’s presence a strict secret. He couldn’t even have servants accompany him.

Alone with the Crown Prince, there was no one else he could turn to for help. It was maddening.

The constant explosions and flying debris nearby sent his heart racing and sweat pouring. Yet, Kiolle mustered the courage to search for the Crown Prince amidst the chaos.

While moving deeper into the danger, opposite to the direction of the fleeing crowds, Kiolle wondered what honor he was seeking in this madness.

His doubt peaked when he finally found the Crown Prince.

“Cease all foolish acts. I will prove the sage’s innocence!” The Crown Prince declared

“What? Who are you to say that?”

“Stand aside, Non-Awakener kid!”

Before the fierce Awakeners with blazing eyes, the Crown Prince, whom Kiolle had desperately sought, boldly revealed his identity.

“How absurd. You lowly beings, do you think you can address me so and remain unscathed? I am the Crown Prince of this empire… Ahh!”

Mid-sentence, the Crown Prince, who had bravely stepped into the fray, was struck from behind by a dark object and collapsed.

“Well done, Gakane! He seems brainwashed. Keep him as far away as possible!”

The dark object entangled the Crown Prince’s waist and flung him into the distance. He rolled to a stop at Kiolle’s feet, like a fallen leaf.

Stunned, Kiolle looked down at the Crown Prince, clutching his cheeks and silently screaming in his head. “Aaahhh!”

“Over there! It’s dangerous, take that person and retreat immediately!”

Yet, his silent scream was abruptly halted by someone’s shout. Trembling, Kiolle clumsily hoisted the Crown Prince and retreated. Watching small fragments of power effortlessly demolish the temple walls and ground, he screamed internally again.

This was no human fight. To Kiolle, it felt like being in the midst of a struggle between colossal monsters.

How could he possibly escape this? Perhaps a crazed beast from the Cavalry could, but Kiolle was just an ordinary human. Frustrated but acknowledging his limitations - he couldn’t even muster a fragment of aura - he doubted his ability to escape while carrying the unconscious Crown Prince.

Eventually, he sought refuge in a corner between buildings, deeming it the safest option. As soon as he laid the Crown Prince down, his legs gave out, and his body shook uncontrollably, not from exhaustion but from surging shock and fear.

In a moment of disbelief, Kiolle da Diarca was grappling with the reality of his recent actions. ‘Such an absurd turn of events… How did this happen?!’ he thought.

He couldn’t believe that he had, all alone, without any other servants or companions, braved a dangerous situation. More so, he had carried the Crown Prince on his back right through the midst of a monstrous battle!

The Kiolle of the past, who valued life, dignity, and honor above all, would never have done such a thing. ‘Is this not loyalty, then what is?’ he wondered. In his mind, he was torn between marveling at his unbelievable feat and suffering over why he ended up in such a dire situation.

‘Why did I… Why did I do this… Is it all because of my father who entrusted me with a role akin to a knight… No, because of the Crown Prince who failed to keep his promise… No, no! If it weren’t for those deceiving scoundrels!’

His torment always ended with a selfish desire to escape and find comfort.

‘To move any further from here is not a good strategy. Soon, the monster from the Cavalry and Duke Peletta will arrive. It’s wiser to endure until then than to exert myself unnecessarily…’

Although he was simply too scared to move, Kiolle comforted himself thinking that staying put was the wiser choice. He regained his composure and felt satisfied with his calm and intelligent decision.

He remained unaware that his judgment felt like someone who trusted and relied on Yuder, Duke Peletta, and the Cavalry more than anyone else.

Suddenly, the Crown Prince groaned.

“Ah, Your Highness, are… are you alright?!” Kiolle asked anxiously.

There was no response. It seemed it would take a while for the Crown Prince to fully regain consciousness. Whatever that dark thing was, it had hit the Crown Prince hard.

Had the Crown Prince been awake, he would have furiously sought out the one who dared strike him, and perhaps even revealed his identity in his eagerness to aid the sage. Thinking about it, maybe it was better for him to wake up after everything was over…

‘No, what am I thinking!’ Kiolle shook his head vigorously, banishing the bad thoughts that had briefly surfaced. Even in a dire situation, such thoughts were inappropriate for a knight.

Sounds of explosions still came from afar. Kiolle, regaining some composure, carefully laid the Crown Prince down and adjusted his position. He had carelessly placed him down earlier, making him look like an abandoned corpse.

If the Crown Prince woke up and realized that, Kiolle might have received a slap.

‘Hah. But why are they causing such a commotion over there? What are they after?’

Finally regaining some semblance of calm, Kiolle began to ponder properly.

He recalled Yuder Aile, a demon and monster of the Cavalry, warning him about deceitful healers and even more dangerous individuals. Indeed, while bringing the Crown Prince, he had caught a glimpse of the sage’s face among the chaos.

Fortunately, they seemed too distracted to notice Kiolle… But why was that person at the funeral of the second son of the Herne family in the first place?

‘Could it be that they came knowing the Crown Prince was in the south? No, that’s unlikely. Then, are they here to plot something foul against one of the nobles, or perhaps targeting the Cavalry?’

Surprisingly, this line of thought accurately penetrated the core of the sage’s actions.

‘When my father sent that man, he did instruct him to bring back proof of his innocence and capabilities. But to resort to such measures?… No. It’s entirely possible if he’s a charlatan. That’s what a charlatan does!’

Then, what about the other Awakeners who were attacking the sage?

Kiolle quickly reached another conclusion.

‘They must be victims of his previous scams. Considering the charlatan’s deeds, it seemed he had done this more than once!’

While this was also essentially accurate, Kiolle himself could not have known the full truth.

‘Even so, to dare cause such a commotion at the funeral of a member of one of the four great Ducal families, the Herne family… If my father knew, he would never employ that man again. Well, that’s a relief!’

As Kiolle was reveling in the sage’s misfortune and smiling to himself, he heard the sound of a group of people running nearby.

‘Is it them?!’

He quickly hunched over, retreating further back while shielding the Crown Prince, holding his breath until the sound completely faded away. He gripped the hilt of his sword, ready to draw it at a moment’s notice.

And just as his tension reached its peak.

“What are you doing here?”

“Ah!”

Contrary to the running sounds he heard from the front, a gloomy and sluggish voice echoed from right behind him.

Startled, Kiolle leaped up, letting out an inarticulate cry as he swung his sword, but his opponent easily dodged it and neutralized him with a simple gesture.

Feeling that unpleasant sensation again, the one where his sword seemed to move against his will just like it had in a past encounter, Kiolle immediately realized the identity of his adversary.

“You, you! Why do you appear from behind?”

“I asked the question first. Shouldn’t you have left immediately upon finding the Crown Prince? Why are you still here? Are you injured? Or perhaps too scared?”

Yuder Aile asked with an emotionless face. Despite the lack of any visible emotional trace, Kiolle inexplicably sensed that Yuder was regarding him as a complete fool at that moment.

Chapter 827

“I asked the question first. Shouldn’t you have left immediately upon finding the Crown Prince? Why are you still here? Are you injured? Or perhaps too scared?”

Yuder Aile asked with an emotionless face. Despite the lack of any visible emotional trace, Kiolle inexplicably sensed that Yuder was regarding him as a complete fool at that moment.

“How can I just go out when it’s so dangerous outside? I was simply waiting for the right moment!”

“So, you’re not injured then. It must be the latter, but why append such pointless excuses?”

“Ah… No…!”

Kiolle, his pride deeply wounded, trembled violently before abruptly turning his head away.

‘That insolent brat, doesn’t he know the saying that a true knight, one who holds back from drawing his sword too quickly, is both wise and strong!?’

“If I hadn’t felt your presence and found you while passing by, you could have actually died. It’s dangerous here, and not a place for the non-Awakeners. You better leave quickly.”

“…”

“Gakane!”

When Yuder turned and called out, a man with red hair suddenly poked his head out. Only then did Kiolle realize that there were two more people nearby - one, an Awakener with red hair, and the other, naturally, was Duke Peletta.

The moment Kiolle’s eyes widened upon seeing the bright aura emanating from the sword in Kishiar’s hand, Yuder didn’t give him a chance to examine it further and forcefully pulled him up.

“Show him the way out. He seems too scared to leave on his own.”

“Ah… Okay. Fine.”

“Who’s scared? Stop saying that! I am a proud member of the Imperial Knights, moving only for His Highness the Crown Prince!”

Bang!

Suddenly, a fragment of power flew in exquisitely from outside, rebounding off the wind force emitted from Yuder’s hand and embedding itself in the wall above Kiolle’s head.

“Ahh!”

While Kiolle screamed and quickly crouched down, covering his head, the other three, including Yuder, remained motionless.

Looking down at Kiolle with an expressionless face, Yuder let out a faint sigh and spoke.

“Gakane.”

“Yes.”

“Forget what I just said. We might need an extra hand until reinforcements arrive. Let’s go.”

“Sure, but what about them?”

Gakane looked back at Kiolle and the Crown Prince with a concerned expression.

“Just keep them protected somehow.”

“You’re going to do it yourself, Yuder? Well, that might be safer in some ways. Though, they might think differently.”

“It’s none of my concern.”

Kiolle couldn’t understand what they meant. However, moments later, as one of Yuder’s eyes flashed a golden hue, Kiolle was shocked into near paralysis at the sight of a dome of water and wind forming around him.

“What is this? Let me out!”

“Stop your nonsense. Step out of there, and you’re dead. Wait for the Cavalry or Imperial Army reinforcements.”

“What… What?!”

“You should have left as soon as you found the Crown Prince.”

And with that, Yuder truly, really, without a single backward glance, left. Left behind, Kiolle stood with his mouth agape, unable to believe the reality he was facing.

‘Is this… What is this.. Did he really go? No, right? He’ll come back, won’t he?’

However, no matter how long he waited, Kiolle heard no sound of Yuder returning. Was that all? Even trapped within the wall of water and wind, the outside scenery was clearly visible and the sounds distinctly audible, making the situation feel even more surreal and frightening. If he leaned slightly, he could even catch glimpses of people fighting outside the barrier.

The barrier looked weak enough to break through with a touch, but in reality, it was not. Kiolle realized Yuder was serious when he saw a blind attack from somewhere dissipate with a pop upon touching the flowing water wall in front of him.

‘He just locks people up because he’s too busy to help? This mad demon! Monster! Damned fiend!’

Kiolle cursed Yuder and then began to berate the other two who had indifferently watched Yuder’s absurd behavior as if it were normal.

The redhead at least pretended to be concerned. But what about Duke Peletta? He just stood there smiling, as if everything Yuder did was perfectly fine, even as his nephew, the Crown Prince, lay sprawled on the ground!

It was doubtful he even recognized the person lying there was Katchian. Both he and Yuder Aile must be mad.

‘Of course, His Highness Prince Katchian is from the Diarca family, so there’s no need for them to worry. But still, still!’

“Aaah! Let me out! I’ll leave on my own, just let me out!”

Kiolle’s screams echoed through the walls of water and wind, sounding faint and tragically distant.

-

Not far away, Yuder observed the figures engaged in battle.

Nahan, Awakeners who appeared to be Nahan’s companions, the sage, and those fighting in place of the sage.

And amidst them, cunningly intermingled, were Kurga, Sunz, and Emon, trying their best to minimize the situation.

The first to catch his eye was indeed Nahan, looking utterly beaten. The man, appearing to be in his middle years, was lightly holding someone’s nape, leaning back and observing the situation.

‘He’s completely ruined since I last saw him.’

His clothes were worn out, his hair a mess for a long time.

One arm, wrapped in something barely qualifying as bandages, hung limply from the shoulder like a heavy load. Though better than the arm, the legs and back bore traces of untreated wounds, and his face, marred by burns, only added to the horror.

Yet, he stood upright, gazing at the sage. His grey eyes, so calm that they sent chills to the onlooker,

One eye, damaged by burns, had turned white and lost focus, but the other eye, still intact, didn’t seem the same. Perhaps it felt more intense and relentless because it was the only one left.

Yuder thought it probably wasn’t just that.

‘That arm must be from the time he clashed with Kishiar in the West. Instead of healing, it’s gotten worse, probably due to overuse of his abilities.’

Anyone with severe injuries naturally needs rest for recovery. But Nahan, hiding himself and egging his companions on for ‘revenge’, and clashing with the Cavalry in the process, continued to overuse his powers. And likely, he must have used them tremendously on his way to find the sage here.

Considering his disdain for the non-Awakeners, it was unlikely he would choose to visit a temple or a physician for proper treatment, making this situation an inevitable outcome.

Repeatedly using one’s abilities in an unrecovered state is a shortcut to draining one’s vitality. The aftereffects of such vitality depletion manifest differently in each individual. A common symptom, as in Nahan’s case, was wounds not healing but rather festering.

To Yuder’s eyes, Nahan seemed to be in a state where an outburst at any moment wouldn’t be surprising.

‘Gakane mentioned that Nahan hadn’t directly used his abilities against the sage. Observing him calmly watching up until now, it seems likely…’

There was naturally a desire for revenge, driving the sage to the brink, but it appeared more likely that Nahan was aware of his own deteriorating condition.

Despite the immense pain, Nahan didn’t let out a single groan but stood focusing intensely. This even made Yuder, typically indifferent to others’ emotions, feel a tinge of revulsion.

‘But that’s a separate matter.’

Yuder noticed a suspicious middle-aged man trembling beside Nahan, serving as a human support. Earlier, Gakane had mentioned an odd person, seemingly familiar, accompanying Nahan. Indeed, it was true.

However, unlike Gakane, Yuder immediately recognized the man’s identity upon seeing him.

‘…The fake sage, Diemon.’

His appearance had drastically aged and shrunk since Yuder last saw him, yet paradoxically, he looked a bit younger than the face Yuder remembered. The man, of an indeterminate age, was shaking and trembling, wrapped in bandages similar to Nahan’s.

‘I heard he fled with the sage… Why is he in such a state beside Nahan?’

The details were unclear, but it seemed certain that he was currently being held by Nahan. How Nahan managed to find the sage and come here was now becoming clear.

‘Anyway…’

It was Yuder’s job to capture these madmen before they self-destructed as they had in their past lives.

“Commander.”

“Hm.”

Yuder glanced back at Kishiar, nodded, and then stepped forward without hesitation. Simultaneously, Kishiar moved to cover Yuder’s back, advancing in the opposite direction.

“Oh…!”

Those who hadn’t anticipated the presence of stealthily observing figures were startled, but the unleashed attacks knew no pause.

Yuder effortlessly slipped into the midst of a maelstrom of dangerously intertwining abilities, to the disbelief of onlookers.

In one hand, a black sword. In the other, a swirling force of elemental power.

The sound of an explosion, more intense than ever, resounded through the air.

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Chapter 828

The sound of an explosion, more intense than ever, resounded through the air.

Those who had shielded their faces from the ensuing blast were stunned into silence at the sight that greeted them once they regained their composure.

“What in the world…”

The attacks unleashed by several had been impeccably blocked by just two individuals. Yuder had fended off the sage’s allies, and Kishiar had thwarted Nahan’s. It was unbelievable, even to those witnessing it.

With their swords and an array of elemental abilities, these two parried every assault using only a single blade and the power of an Awakener. They straightened up, exchanging looks of mutual reassurance, without uttering a word.

Kishiar, surrounded by a blue aura, gently shook off his sword and smiled softly, without a sound.

In stark contrast, Yuder maintained a flawless, unemotional stance, ready to move at any moment.

Though their appearances were polar opposites, in some sense, they seemed perfectly interlocked, like two pieces of a puzzle.

No one dared speak first, witnessing a scene that could only exist with absolute confidence that their counterpart would block every attack from the opposite side.

Amidst this tense silence, it was Kishiar La Orr’s soft voice that broke it.

“To think we’d encounter those we’ve long sought, all at once. Today is a fortunate day.”

“…”

“It seems we were bound to meet soon, but this time and place are less than ideal. Surely, you didn’t think this commotion would go unnoticed? So, do you have something to say?”

“…Nahan, did you really go this far?”

The first response came from the sage’s side. He was not looking at Kishiar, but at Nahan.

Though not as battered as Nahan, the sage’s appearance was also disheveled. His meticulously combed beard was now tangled, and his skin bore fine, blood-red streaks from overusing his abilities.

But what truly marred his visage was his hoarse voice, devoid of its usual calm, and his bloodshot eyes, filled with unmistakable irritation and anger.

“Kidnapping Diemon to lure me here… and summoning the Cavalry here wasn’t enough…!”

“In this situation, you still act so well, our esteemed sage.”

Nahan replied with a disdainful glance.

“You were the one who prepared in advance to abandon everyone and come here all alone, so I’m not sure who called whom. Oh, have you decided to stop referring to yourself with that odd title?”

Nahan continued, looking at the trembling sage’s beard.

“Of course, I came here anticipating this.”

“Please, no more lies. Because of you, Nahan, the Star of Nagran has lost its chance. A chance so hard-won, ruined! You killed the Star of Nagran and now me, what next? Do you think you alone will survive this?”

“My goal has always been singular. Your questioning seems to imply you’ve never once considered sharing that goal.”

“Nahan!”

Engulfed in mutual suspicion and hatred, and lost in the memories of their past sufferings and losses, they were unable to recognize the truth even in a situation where a little thought would have sufficed.

In fact, the suspicion that the other party might be collaborating with the Cavalry was a mere fragment compared to other concerns.

The sage was most angered by the ruin of his long-prepared plans to seize power. The catastrophic downfall of the Star of Nagran, which he had always believed would support him, was something he had never even imagined.

From the moment Nahan realized how twisted he had become under the guise of faith, he prioritized condemning the sage over all his previous objectives. Already a man who wouldn’t hesitate to take extreme actions for his beliefs, he was now determined to continue, even at the cost of his own destruction.

Questions like ‘why has it come to this?’ no longer existed for either side.

Reacted by the sage’s anger, his followers, who were brainwashed, writhed in agony before resuming their attacks. Nahan’s colleagues, recently freed from the sage’s influence due to his powerful illusion abilities, prepared to counterattack.

“It seems the Cavalry no longer catches their eyes.”

“That’s why they’re causing such chaos here. For them, who’s in league with the Cavalry is no longer important.”

Yuder quietly responded to Kishiar’s comment, who remained composed even amidst the brewing storm of attacks.

Though Kishiar’s initial statement was ambiguous enough to fuel misunderstanding, it was unclear if the reaction was too good or not.

“As promised, I’ll handle the sage’s side.”

“And I’ll take care of the opposite.”

“Understood. Gakane! Kurga! You and the others take care of the surroundings and help out!”

Yuder, weapon in hand, lunged toward the sage as soon as he finished speaking.

With intense concentration, the sage’s commands to his followers, and even his movement, appeared incredibly slow in Yuder’s eyes.

His voice was equally sluggish.

“Get to Nahan–hurry……! That– Cavalry——too–-!”

Filled with rage, yet searching for a place to flee alone, the sage’s eyes darted around in panic.

Who would still call this distorted figure the sage?

Initially, Yuder thought this sage might be a completely different person from Diemon he had encountered in his previous life, but he was wrong. The vile nature etched on the sage’s face now was not much different from Diemon’s after he had confessed his deeds, battered by Yudrain Aile.

Yuder once again blocked the onslaught of attacks all at once, as he had done before. This time, he deliberately allowed a reactive force, causing a storm-like roar.

“Argh…!”

“Ah!”

The fierce backlash from the explosion sent those in the frontline tumbling and screaming. Although there had been moments in the battle where blind forces clashed and rebounded uncontrollably, it had never been like this.

The power that now repelled and utterly overwhelmed them felt like an unstoppable, massive storm.

“Uh…uhhh.”

Groaning, those who raised their heads, despite being brainwashed, hesitated as if struck by fear. Their instinct to survive was overwhelmed by the immense pressure they faced.

Seizing this opportunity, Yuder imbued his sword with the power of the wind and swung it skillfully. By cunningly altering the speed and destabilizing the center of gravity, a one-handed sword could wield as much, if not more, power than a two-handed sword.

The moment a brainwashed knight’s sword clashed with Yuder’s, it partially slid off. Yuder, seizing the moment of his opponent’s disrupted stance, thrust his wind-empowered palm into the knight’s solar plexus. Accompanied by a sound that seemed impossible for a human body to make, the knight was sent flying helplessly through the air.

Without a backward glance at the fallen knight who now convulsed and foamed at the mouth, Yuder neutralized the next enemy’s weapon, tripped him by the ankles, and then blasted water in his face. The foe fell backward, not even having the chance to scream.

The next assailant, an Awakener who moved sluggishly due to their body-enhancement ability, was straightforwardly struck on the back of the head. Another, inferior in power to Yuder and using a conflicting element, was neutralized and rendered unconscious.

The time it took Yuder to incapacitate these four, with a complex interplay of force and physical movement, was nothing more than a few blinks of an eye.

Even as he simultaneously wielded his sword and power, Yuder's ruthlessly efficient attacks left his enemies collapsing without understanding how they had been defeated.

"No, this can't be! What, what…!"

The sage's voice, panicking and shouting incoherently, echoed in the ears.

The sage's brainwashing ability was undeniably threatening. However, his weakness was starkly evident; being a mental ability user, he lacked significant physical strength.

Moreover, unlike Nahan, the sage had never directly encountered or confronted Yuder.

This was a significant difference.

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Chapter 829

In the brief moment he watched Yuder Aile in battle, the man once known by various names-Sage, Wise One, Ajihen Toom-reminisced about his old name for the first time in ages. Once, he had been known by the plain and unsophisticated name of Karl Enfile. His occupation was equally unremarkable: a low-ranking official.

Such positions often attracted destitute nobles. The job involved nothing impressive and frequently required dealing with commoners, making it both tedious and demeaning.

However, for those without an inherited estate or sold titles, without the means or physical ability to become a knight, and with only the remnants of past glory, being a low-ranking official was their only line to success.

If one played their cards right, they could rise to a high-ranking official, perhaps even to the fourth rank, living enviably in a grand house in the capital.

Karl Enfile too had dreamed of this as he became a low-ranking official.

He possessed enviable self-interest and the eloquence to mask it well. He was an unmatched talent in softly deceiving those in misfortune, understanding their hearts.

Yet, even with his abilities, true success eluded him. He realized this when he first met the current High Minister Hebreyina Reiflang, understanding that with his level of skill, he could never win against a ‘real’ contender.

Hebreyina entered the administration later than Karl, but she was from a notable noble family and popular in social circles for her decent looks.

It wasn’t rare for noblewomen, unwilling to marry, to become officials. However, Hebreyina had even married.

Yet, upon her arrival, she effortlessly snatched the promotion Karl had long coveted-a bolt from the blue for him.

Karl fiercely contested her promotion, even proposing a public debate to prove who was more deserving, but the outcome was disastrous.

Until then, Karl had dismissed Hebreyina Reiflang as just a well-connected woman, incapable in her work. Rumor had it, she wanted to reform the corrupt practices of the administration, which seemed far-fetched.

A pampered noblewoman besting him seemed impossible.

But he was wrong.

On the day of the debate, she was like an overwhelming monster beyond human capability, with her commanding eloquence and encyclopedic knowledge, even on matters outside her responsibility.

Karl Enfile, who had prided himself on his manipulation of people, was thoroughly outmatched, unable to muster any significant rebuttal. Even those who disliked Hebreyina couldn’t object to her promotion after witnessing the debate.

Karl’s downfall was met with ridicule and pity. Hebreyina, after her promotion, thoroughly audited the work Karl had done, demoting him to a position like Blue Crown’s archivist.

The fallout severed his ties with a family he was discussing marriage with, and as Hebreyina ascended unprecedentedly to High Minister, everyone began to shun Karl Enfile.

And now.

Long having discarded the name Karl Enfile after gaining new powers, the sight of Yuder Aile, who literally obliterated everything, momentarily brought back memories of that public debate to the sage’s mind.

The sage had speculated that the greatest reason the Cavalry appeared to have an upper hand against them was likely due to Nahan’s betrayal. Of

course, this didn’t mean their skills were utterly hopeless, but in a game of collusion, real skill seemed irrelevant.

Thus, he had undervalued Yuder Aile’s abilities, assuming them to be nothing extraordinary.

He had heard rumors about Yuder being an Awakener who could wield multiple attributes. However, the sage, having encountered numerous Awakeners, knew well that mastery of multiple attributes didn’t necessarily imply greatness.

He also believed that Yuder’s rise to fame as the hero of the West, particularly in the monster subjugation event, would have been impossible without the aid of the Star of Nagran’s prominent Awakeners in the West. Yet, no one seemed to acknowledge the existence of the Star of Nagran.

Wealth and fame had accrued solely to Yuder Aile and the Cavalry.

A cunning whelp.

A young Awakener in his twenties who had snatched away the opportunity for success the sage had been preparing for so long.

He had become a commoner who received a noble title from the Emperor after decades, and was awarded many honors. Though the barony he received was a single-generation title, that didn’t matter.

Once a noble, even minor achievements could pave the way to higher ranks, a fact well understood by anyone with some sense.

‘That’s what I had thought…’

But upon finally facing him, Yuder’s gaze completely defied the sage’s expectations.

He was merciless, yet not swayed by emotions, possessing a fearsome and overwhelming aura.

This wasn’t the look of a youth inflated by early success.

There was no trace of the typical excessiveness of young, powerful but inexperienced individuals.

The Awakeners sent by the sage crumbled helplessly under a few gestures from Yuder Aile.

If there ever was a human embodiment of a grim reaper, it would probably look like him.

His relentless demeanor, the way he eyed the sage during the fight as if marking his next prey, his overwhelming ability leaving no room for response, all reminded him of the debate with Hebreyina Reiflang.

Even the sage, so adept at feigning goodness and righteousness, couldn’t maintain his composure recalling the event that had turned his life upside down.

His carefully established bases had crumbled, whereabouts of many of the sufficiently brainwashed Awakeners unknown.

Even after achieving the incredible feat of infiltrating the Sun Palace, the attitude of Duke Diarca hadn’t changed significantly. Kiolle da Diarca, the Duke’s son, showed a strange contempt and aversion towards the Sage, seemingly ignorant of everything yet.

The sage had considered brainwashing Kiolle out of frustration, kept hidden, but seizing the opportunity was difficult as Kiolle openly despised the sage’s side.

The sage concluded it was better to quickly brainwash Duke Diarca and silently kill Kiolle, rather than expend effort on the arrogant young noble.

Capturing the young Crown Prince had been a stroke of luck, but even in his brainwashed state, his mental stability was as precarious as a hastily stacked tower of stones.

The Crown Prince’s capricious nature, his self-love, and self-prioritization made him too risky for a long-term alliance. The fact that Duke Diarca held

the real power further diminished the Crown Prince’s value as an asset.

If things had gone as originally planned, the sage should have built his influence through the Crown Prince and successfully completed the tasks assigned by Duke Diarca, summoning the power of Star of Nagran to the capital. Utilizing their strength, he would have already broken more than half of the Cavalry’s momentum and suppressed the Emperor’s forces. Even the cunning old fox, Duke Diarca, would have eventually felt trust in him.

‘I could have brainwashed him quickly then…’

Where did it all go wrong? He had carefully considered and neutralized each potential obstacle, proceeding cautiously.

Watching Yuder’s rampage for that brief moment, the sage bit his lip, feeling a mix of unfairness and regret.

His brainwashing ability was immensely useful, but it had many limitations. He could force his way through these restrictions, but such forced exertion of power was short-lived and harmful to both his mind and body.

The sage had already used his power several times forcibly on those around him to counter Nahan. Though he didn’t show it, his body was now half-paralyzed, and the rapid use of his mental abilities made it difficult to maintain coherent thoughts as usual.

Simple, fleeting thoughts, intense emotions, desires, and instincts began to slowly consume him.

He trembled in pain, overwhelmed by the desire to give up and flee.

But as his mind simplified and momentarily forgot his rage towards Nahan, a new possibility he hadn’t considered before dawned on him.

‘It won’t be easy to flee from such a foe, even if I risk everything. But Yuder Aile choosing to confront me alone might actually be an opportunity.’

As Yuder Aile exerted his power to take down the last Awakener the Sage had sent, he noticed Duke Peletta seemingly conversing with Nahan's side in the quickly shifting view. Other members of the Cavalry were busy attending to their fallen comrades, moving them to safety.

'Even in this state, I still have some power left. A power that, in this situation, could be more useful than anything else…'

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Chapter 830

From the moment he awakened his power, the sage had viewed all humans as mere materials to be enslaved.

Yuder Aile, undeniably strong, was still human and thus bound to have vulnerabilities. If it were possible to exploit these weaknesses and brainwash Yuder Aile, even for a brief moment, what could be the outcome?

Successful brainwashing would turn his formidable abilities into the perfect means of escape from this predicament.

Even if not Yuder, targeting other more vulnerable members of the Cavalry wasn't a bad option. Of course, it would exact a toll on his body, but capturing anyone and using them as a hostage could provide a way out.

Ordinarily, he would never consider such an act, out of concern for his own well-being.

Yet the dire circumstances had driven him to contemplate this as the only viable option.

'Yes, it's better to brainwash just once, rather than maintain control over many.'

Just one time, brainwashing a single individual would suffice.

If he could catch Yuder Aile off guard, and establish contact just once to forcibly wield that power…!

That was the moment.

Suddenly, someone briefly appeared in the sage's field of vision.

Emerging from nowhere, it was someone the sage recognized.

“Lord Nahan!”

Hosanna.

How had this devoted young man from the Southern lands, who had dedicated everything to Nahan, appeared here at this moment?

The sage was as surprised as Nahan must have been. The commotion on the other side had inadvertently drawn Yuder Aile’s gaze.

Seizing the opportunity, the sage shouted.

“Go! You don’t need to protect me! Hurry and get that man!”

His voice was desperate, and those who had been his last line of defense, encircling him, began to move.

Most of them were non-Awakener knights and nobles, used as human shields against the Awakeners. They were a mess from their repeated roles as human shields, but the sage’s command was absolute.

“Ah… Ahhh!”

The non-Awakeners stumbled as they charged towards Yuder Aile.

The sage, anticipating Yuder would easily dispatch them, pondered his next move to distract him.

But then, something unexpected happened.

Yuder Aile, who had effortlessly wielded power and weapons against the Awakeners, hesitated for the first time when facing these non-Awakener nobles.

There was a noticeable change in his demeanor.

The sage realized it wasn’t an illusion when he saw Yuder handle the non-Awakener nobles far more carefully than before, knocking them unconscious.

‘So, even someone as arrogant and powerful as he ultimately has a hard time against nobles, being of commoner origins himself.’

Why hadn’t he thought of this sooner?

A smile crept through the sage’s tangled beard.

It was a typical human assumption, to view everyone from one’s own level, but the conclusion wasn’t far off. At the same moment, Yuder Aile, with an impassive face, was irritatedly thinking the same.

‘What a nuisance.’

He was relieved that the sage seemed less formidable than expected. Although he had to be more cautious with the remaining non-Awakener nobles compared to the Awakeners, it was manageable.

It would take more time, but he didn’t expect any significant deviation from his anticipated outcome.

But who could have foreseen this sudden turn of events?

‘Hosanna… How did he get here?’

The appearance of Hosanna here meant that he had escaped. Yuder wondered what had happened, as Kanna and the other members were surely guarding the underground securely.

While this was a pressing concern, what troubled him most was the change in the situation due to Hosanna’s arrival. Hosanna’s mobility, while not threatening on its own, became a different matter when combined with Nahan. Yuder couldn’t afford to let Nahan, who was almost within grasp, slip away now. To prevent them from joining forces and escaping, Yuder himself had to quickly intervene.

It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Kishiar. Naturally, two were better than one, and to pair up, dealing with the sage quickly was essential. However, the current situation demanded more time.

‘If only the remaining ones weren’t non-Awakener nobles…’

The sage thought Yuder hesitated simply because of their status, but that was both right and wrong. More precisely, Yuder was contemplating the aftermath of this situation.

The incident that had earned Yuder Aile the most enemies in his previous life was when he killed the fake sage, Diemon. He had many enemies even before that, but the repercussions of this event were on a different scale.

From the Emperor to the nobility, renowned figures from all walks of society, and even within the Cavalry, where Yuder had the most influence, countless individuals turned against him because of that incident.

Yuder realized then that humans, especially proud nobles, do not want to accept being deceived. Though many knew logically that Yuder had done the right thing, accepting that someone they revered was a fraud was a different matter.

Their belief in the sage had morphed into a belief in themselves, so they chose to resent Yuder instead. It was easier and spared their pride.

After that incident, the Cavalry’s reputation plummeted. Even those who received help from them resented the presence of a Commander who had killed the sage.

Of course, the real sage’s current influence wasn’t as great as before, and those obstructing Yuder now were temporarily brainwashed non-Awakener individuals.

Dealing with them should have been easier than breathing compared to the Awakeners he had faced earlier.

It was unlikely that the same situation as in his previous life would recur, but Yuder believed the lessons learned from that event were still applicable.

After being brainwashed by the sage and then subdued by Yuder, whom would these non-Awakener nobles resent more once everything was over?

The sage? Or Yuder Aile and the Cavalry?

In a normal situation, they would have been grateful to Yuder for saving them, but nothing was certain in the aftermath of mental manipulation. Moreover, these nobles were likely close to the Herne family, attendees of the Second Prince of Herne's funeral.

If, after waking from the brainwashing, they used even a minor injury as an excuse to demand reparations from Yuder and the Cavalry and protested ostentatiously in front of the Imperial Palace, Yuder wouldn't be surprised.

That's why he found this situation bothersome. Dealing with brainwashed opponents whom he could not subdue by inflicting even minor injuries was an unwelcome task, even for Yuder Aile.

'Damn it.'

Yuder grappled with the urge to swiftly bury all opposition and the rational realization that such reckless action could deplete his strength unnecessarily, making the confrontation with Nahan more troublesome.

'Besides… the person who will have to bear the consequences of my actions is no longer me.'

The one who would have to endure the storm that would befall the Cavalry, similar to what happened in his past life, was no longer Yuder.

It was Commander Kishiar La Orr.

This fact was of utmost importance.

All other impulses paled in the face of his name.

It was at that very moment, as the golden light blazing within Yuder's eyes began to dim, revealing his discomfort, that a warning was shouted.

"Yuder! Watch out!"

At the sound of his name, Yuder instinctively tilted his head, following his innate senses.

Something whisked past his hair from behind and shot forward.

Simultaneously, a figure, seemingly faster than the first, pierced through the air, moving rapidly in the same direction.

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Chapter 831

Unlike before, Yuder was attempting to push away or topple the brainwashed individuals in a slow and cautious manner, yet without any direct contact.

The brainwashed, persistently rising and charging towards him, were relentless in their pursuit.

The sage, controlling them with an attitude far bolder than before, was orchestrating their movements.

Amidst this confrontation, black shadows, like the bars of a prison, slammed into place, and at that moment, someone flew in and landed within them.

The newcomer, who had flown in, wrapping the shadows around her hand like a rope used for support on a tree, was none other than Ever Beck.

“Ever?”

“Yes, it’s me.”

As soon as Ever straightened up, flexing her knees, the shadows embedded in the ground withdrew and began to move like the heads of threatening snakes toward the brainwashed.

Caught off guard by this sudden appearance, the brainwashed stumbled to avoid the shadows and Ever seized the opportunity to speak.

“I’m glad I’m not too late. I figured out that the sage’s trail led here, but in the process, Hosanna escaped.”

“…”

“Kanna is still outside, reinforcements are on the way, and thanks to Hinn and Finn, I arrived first. As you can see, Gakane helped me get through this chaos.”

Yuder’s surprise quickly faded. He shook his head and gestured towards an unseen area where Nahan and Kishiar were likely to be.

“We’re fine here, go to the Commander first.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t do that.”

Ever’s response was unexpected.

“The moment I arrived, the Commander gestured for me to come here. Remember, the sage is my responsibility too.”

‘…What?’

Just as he spoke, the shadows’ diversion ended.

“Die….!”

“Die…. Die….!”

The brainwashed knights, hacking through the shadows with their swords, began to swing their weapons wildly. Ever, raising her hands in readiness, pointed her glowing fingers at them.

Knowing well the lethal effectiveness of the technique Ever was about to unleash, Yuder shouted just before its activation.

“Ever! Stop for a moment…..”

He didn’t have time to say that excessive force shouldn’t be used against the non-Awakeners.

‘This won’t do. I need to stop it first.’

It was at that moment Yuder was about to condense the wind.

Suddenly, Ever disappeared from Yuder’s sight.

No, not disappeared - she moved with such explosive speed and at an unexpected angle that it seemed she vanished.

She took advantage of the moment when she was out of everyone’s sight, moving behind the brainwashed knights, and gently pushed the back of an unsuspecting one.

The touch of her fingertips was simultaneously swift and yet appeared slow.

And then, in the moment she dodged away, the knights she had touched stopped momentarily before collapsing to the ground, rolling over.

It seemed like they would rise again quickly as before, but this time, they only twitched briefly and did not stand up again. They were perfectly subdued and unconscious, without any visible wounds.

Even the sage, and Yuder himself, couldn’t comprehend what had just happened in front of their eyes.

“What did you just say?”

After coldly checking on the unconscious, Ever turned and asked.

“…That technique. What is it?”

“Oh, it’s something new I made.”

“When did you do it?”

“While following these guys’ trail!”

Ever casually responded and then, as more brainwashed charged at her, she launched her hand in the same manner and spoke again.

“Last time, after what happened, I couldn’t just do nothing. As one of the Deputy Commanders of the Cavalry, how could I let the same enemy, in the same way, get the best of me again! Ah, thank you.”

The sudden word of gratitude from Ever was because Yuder was able to deflect a weapon that had been hurled from her blind spot. Yuder, with intense focus in his eyes, watched Ever, who, like a silent whirlwind, was bringing down their enemies between each of her words.

Responding to his will, Yuder's Eye of Magic shone brighter than before in a strong golden hue, finally revealing the true nature of her new technique.

Ever Beck had the ability to significantly enhance the skin and strength of her hands, concentrating minute energy at her fingertips to strike her foes. There was a time when she had contemplated developing a technique to compensate for the perceived drawbacks of this power, but Yuder's advice had dissuaded her from doing so.

It was a power that excelled in close combat. Originally impressive, but could be further refined through meticulous control.

Impressive as it was, her newly developed technique went a step further.

The bodies of the brainwashed, touched by Ever's fingertips.

The minutely controlled force, barely visible to the naked eye, absorbed by their clothing, spread throughout their bodies in an unseen impact.

In Yuder's Eye of Magic, the ripples created by Ever's power resembled a lake disturbed by a small stone.

The ripples were gentle and fine, seemingly non-aggressive. Yet, the moment one realized them, they engulfed the body like a sudden wave, delivering a paralyzing shock and effectively immobilizing vital points.

Silently. Peacefully and slowly.

Yet, definitively subduing the enemy with thousands, tens of thousands of these fine impacts.

At first glance, the technique didn't seem powerful, but its essence lay in subduing the enemy without any visible harm.

It was a remarkable technique, developed in the midst of such busyness, keeping her strengths intact while repeatedly honing and refining them to their limits.

Why she developed such a technique became apparent from her recent explanation.

Ever had encountered the sage in the capital and faced those he had brainwashed. Had it been a quiet place without onlookers, she might have successfully completed her mission. However, her power was far from suitable for such a scenario.

To the onlookers, the evil one was clearly the other party, but when the brainwasher played the victim with his brainwashed minions, the one who appeared aggressively became more noticeable.

Consequently, attracting the nobles' attention and enduring their humiliating remarks without completing her mission must have been a painfully memorable experience for Ever.

Embedded in Ever's new technique was the effort and thorough contemplation of how she would face the sage and his various brainwashed adversaries in future battles.

One can't always fight in comfortable settings, especially against those who use people as weapons through brainwashing.

Then, at least, she resolved to develop a technique with her own hands that wouldn't aid the enemy, while being most beneficial for her side.

Endlessly delving into this single goal, the answer Ever found was here.

'…I see.'

Having grasped this, Yuder withdrew the power from his Eye of Magic.

Yuder had thought he knew Ever Beck very well. Her power control had been exceptional in their previous life, after all.

However, he now realized that perhaps he was the one who had least understood her potential, trapped in the memories of their past life. The level of her current abilities couldn't simply be described as extraordinary.

A new creation that surpassed all expectations, a dazzling advancement.

In their previous life, Yuder had always trusted and relied on Ever, the ten-year veteran Deputy Commander of the Cavalry. Yet, she had never been capable of such feats back then.

And now, this new technique, crafted by her fingertips, was precisely what Yuder needed most.

'The thought of asking Ever to step back now seems utterly absurd.'

Yuder knew all too well that Ever, more than anyone, yearned to capture the sage, gratefully accepting the opportunity to rectify the past mistakes Kishiar had given out.

He sighed deeply.

Up until Ever's arrival, Yuder's mind had been slowly but surely encroached upon by anxious thoughts and memories of his past life, all of which halted in their tracks.

His sharp focus towards Kishiar's direction, and ears attuned there, all ceased and closed off.

Yuder then addressed Ever.

"Don't worry about the rear, just continue as you are. I'll provide support."

Yuder decided he no longer needed to be the one to capture the sage himself.

The sage had been pursued by Ever thus far. Having come this far, it seemed right to leave the sage's direct handling to Ever, while Yuder would suffice with supporting from behind.

In this situation, he accepted that he couldn’t achieve a ‘quiet and safe resolution’ in the way he had always wanted, more surely than Ever could.

In the past, he would not have allowed anyone else to take the forefront over himself. But now, it didn’t make him feel anxious or bad.

Ever glanced over and nodded faintly, as if understanding. Then, she plunged back into her extreme focus, exerting her power and launching into action once again.

“Ever! Yuder!”

“We’re here!”

Soon after, the Eldore siblings joined the fray.

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Chapter 832

“Ever! Yuder!”

“We’re here!”

Soon after, the Eldore siblings joined the fray.

“…Huh? Is it all over already?”

“Not yet, but it seems it will be soon.”

The ones who responded were not Yuder and Ever, but Sunz and Emon, who were busy collecting and isolating the fallen enemies from afar.

“Yuder seemed to struggle against the brainwashed non-Awakeners for a moment, but as soon as Deputy Commander Ever appeared, the tide turned in an instant. Once we take down the remaining ones, only the so-called sage will be left.”

“Oh…”

“Thank goodness… Ever did it.”

The siblings’ faces, usually playful, brightened upon hearing this.

“Where’s the Commander?”

“He was nearby a while ago… but moved further away when a southerner joined the enemies. After Deputy Commander Ever arrived, Mr. Gakane and Mr. Kurga joined him there.”

Sunz glanced vaguely behind the large temple building. The increasingly heavy sleet and grey clouds made the surroundings nearly as dark as night, complicating the assessment of their scattered allies.

Sunz, with his vision ability, could discern people behind the building, but others would find it difficult.

“That so. Then we’ll go help Ever and Yuder first!”

“Thanks for the info!”

“Uh… Yeah, sure.”

Before Sunz finished, the two were already moving away, their footsteps thundering on the ground.

Sunz watched their retreating figures, then spoke.

“…It’s all well, but why did they come in such a form? I forgot to ask.”

The Eldore siblings, unlike usual, had bulked up. This being their first close encounter in such a state, Sunz and Emon were deeply impressed, a testament to their time spent with the Cavalry.

“So what, they look well-suited for exerting strength. That must be an ability, too.”

As Emon spoke, he busily tied up a brainwashed enemy defeated by Ever.

“I heard those two have short-range teleportation abilities… If they have two abilities, that’s really impressive. But isn’t that large form too big, making it hard to dodge attacks? Is it safe for them to fight like that?”

“Hey, Captain Sunz? This isn’t the time to worry about others. Our numbers are growing, but who knows when more suspicious characters will appear, and this sleet feels ominous. Let’s not let our guard down and focus on our tasks.”

Sunz, still unaccustomed to his title, pursed his lips in shy annoyance.

“No need to tell me, I’m managing just fine. But what’s this about the sleet feeling ominous? Is some Awakener manipulating the weather to cause this?”

That would be impossible even for Yuder Aile, renowned for manipulating natural elements at will. As Sunz said this, Emon looked up at the sky.

“No, just as I said, the feeling is increasingly unsettling. Sunz, have you ever seen such weather in the south?”

“Sleet is common, but if it’s getting dark, isn’t that just the weather now?”

“In my view, this is different from normal sleet. Usually in the southern winter, even if it’s cold, it soon turns to rain… Look. This sleet is getting bigger and harder over time, instead of melting.”

Emon reached out and showed Sunz the sleet that had accumulated on his shoulder.

As he said, the sleet, which initially boasted a consistency somewhere between rain and snow, had now become so firm in texture when grasped, that it almost resembled hail.

Sunz, who had been busily darting about in his duties, was surprised to realize how the weather had changed without his notice.

“When did it become like this?”

“Until last night, the sky was relatively clear. I didn’t check thoroughly, but it didn’t seem like the kind of cloud formation that would produce something like this. The sudden onset of this weather is strange, and it’s only getting stronger.”

Frowning, Emon discarded the compressed sleet in his hand. Sunz gazed at his friend’s darkened face in silence before gently replying.

“Hmm. You have a point. But even so, we can’t stop this weather, can we?”

“…”

“I get that you’re not happy because this weather doesn’t suit your abilities, but calm down and focus on your tasks.”

“Damn, you noticed.”

Emon muttered lightly and looked up at the cloud-filled sky one last time.

“I wish this lousy weather that doesn’t even let a spark fly would clear up already…”

-

‘It will be over soon.’

Yuder, watching Ever fiercely battling from behind, coldly assessed the struggling sage.

The sage’s weapon was humans.

But without these weapons, he would be just another powerless human like other mental-type Awakeners.

Ever’s new technique had been devastatingly effective against the sage’s brainwashed minions. With Yuder focusing solely on rear support, their impact was amplified.

The sage, of course, didn’t just succumb easily. But those affected by Ever’s technique could hardly move again, even if the sage poured more brainwashing into them.

This meant the sage’s ability to relentlessly revive his minions, even if they were battered and worn, was now severely crippled.

Although there were stubborn brainwashed Awakeners who had much more stamina and ability compared to brainwashed non-Awakeners, his concern was alleviated with the recent arrival of the Eldore siblings.

“Here we go!”

“More persistent than leeches. Ever! Quick, hit this side!”

The bulked-up Eldore siblings appeared, brushing off physical attacks as if merely tickled. Their mere presence, threatening and attention-grabbing, was a great help to Ever, who was exhausted from repeatedly using her new techniques.

Initially, Yuder thought they might resent being told to just take hits and support Ever. But the siblings, surprisingly, followed his orders without complaint, probably feeling responsible for allowing Hosanna to escape. However, Yuder couldn’t guess that far yet.

‘If Ever has grown this much, maybe those two could too.’

So, with the Eldore siblings drawing attention and fending off attacks, Yuder securing the rear, and Ever regaining her focus to accurately land her new techniques, their coordination was flawless.

It was hard to believe this was their first time combining their efforts in such a way.

And finally.

“Argh…ugh…”

Riding Yuder’s wind, Ever leaped high into the air, spun around, and precisely hit the last remaining non-Awakener with her technique.

As if struck by lightning, the figure trembled violently before slowly collapsing onto the sleet-covered ground. The fall seemed to happen in slow motion.

“No… No! Get up! Get up, I say! Rise, quickly!”

Despite the sage’s screams, no one attempted to rise again.

The Eldore siblings and Ever slowly approached him.

“So, it’s just you left now?”

“Do you know how long we’ve waited for this day?”

“We’re acquainted, aren’t we?”

All three, especially Ever, were greatly drained of energy. Yet, her mind, unlike her body, was still caught in a state of extreme focus and excitement, oblivious to her exhaustion.

She couldn’t remember how long she had waited for this day.

To prepare a technique to confront the sage when they met again, she had secretly relied a lot on the Eldore siblings and other allies.

There had been doubts about how useful this technique would be.

But when the time came, her efforts did not betray her, yielding far greater results than expected.

This was possible because of the support from her comrades who allowed Ever to use her abilities to the fullest, and most importantly, because of Yuder. He could have cleared this place alone if he wanted, but Yuder chose to step back and thoroughly support her. This alignment with Yuder’s wishes felt like an immense recognition to Ever.

For the first time since becoming an Awakener, Ever fought to her limits, her hands and feet trembling with fatigue, yet her mind became clearer and more serene.

It was like embracing something new and unknown, yet always present within her.

A sense of unrestrained joy enveloped her.

“Do not come any closer.”

As they approached, the sage retreated, shaking his head. His condition looked even more strained than Ever’s. Limping, yet still desperately looking for an escape, he reminded her of their encounter in the capital, yet starkly different.

“If you come any closer, I will have no choice but to use my powers in self-defense. No, I will use them. I will proclaim to the world that the Cavalry and Nahan attacked me and innocent people first. Soon, those who will rescue me will come…!”

“Who will?”

The one who asked, Yuder, had not moved towards the sage but remained still where he stood.

“Who’s coming to save you?”

“…Well……!”

The Sage, his beard trembling as he tried to continue, suddenly hesitated.

The young Awakeners who had been loyal enough to follow him to the capital.

The three bases he had diligently expanded and filled with the Star of Nagran’s Awakeners.

Nahan, unsettling but always exceptional in ability.

And even Diemon, who had last expressed a wish to help the sage.

None of them were by his side anymore.

He only then fully realized that those who had always been by his side for years were now gone.

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Chapter 833

It was a strange occurrence. Clearly, there had been numerous brainwashed followers around him, so many that losing a few would go unnoticed. Yet, where had all those people vanished to?

The sage had arrived here alone, but he had no doubts that when he left, it would be with several companions in tow. It was only now that he recalled this.

‘Indeed… here, I planned to forge useful alliances with the nobility… to associate with them in the future.’

But those very people had long since been vanquished, fallen to the hands of the Cavalry.

Unable to speak, the sage was met with a cold gaze from Yuder, who addressed him sharply.

“There’s no one left to come to your rescue, Karl Enfile. You’ve thrown them all away with your own hands.”

“No… that’s not true… Surely…!”

As the sage attempted to retort, he realized, belatedly, what Yuder had called him.

His mind, already overheating due to an ability overload, came to a sudden halt, shocked.

“…What did you just call me?”

“Isn’t that your name? Karl Enfile.”

Yuder’s voice carried an air of stating an obvious fact, emotionless and matter-of-fact.

The eyes of the sage, Karl Enfile, trembled greatly.

‘How does he know that name?’

The name Karl Enfile was one he had discarded upon awakening his abilities and leaving the capital.

To say he had discarded it was no mere metaphor. He had erased it so thoroughly that it was legally untraceable.

Even as a low-ranking official, managing documents and erasing information was not a difficult task.

Those who could remember and speak of Karl Enfile had long been brainwashed by him, their memories erased. Even on the Star of Nagran, there was no one who knew of the sage’s past. Even if Nahan had attempted to sell information about the sage, one cannot speak of what they do not know.

Even when he returned to the capital to meet the Crown Prince, he had taken extra care to erase any trace of himself. How then, could that name have come from the lips of the Cavalry?

‘It’s certain… I only met the Cavalry recently… How, in such a short time…!’

The sage surmised that the Cavalry must have learned of him on the day he met Nahan in the capital. He couldn’t have imagined that they had been trailing him long before that, watching him even within the Crown Prince’s palace, under the vigilant eyes of Yuder’s coercive ally, Kiolle.

The existence of the suspicious pharmacist Enon, who could navigate the darkest alleys of the capital as if they were his own palm, and Kanna Wand, the top information reader with a biological father as a high-ranking manager in the building where Karl Enfile once worked, was equally unknown to him.

Had he known that all this information was gathered by Kishiar and Yuder, who had completely anticipated and countered his every move, he might have gone mad.

It would have been quite an effective mental attack, but Yuder had chosen not to proceed that way.

Instead, he said just one thing to the confused sage.

“There’s only one thing that matters. There’s only one person left here for the Cavalry to take care of.”

That person was the sage himself.

He was neither a noble nor a non-Awakener that the Cavalry had no authority to deal with directly. If he were to meet an unexpected end here, no one would know.

Of course, Yuder’s words didn’t explicitly mean he would kill him on the spot, but the moment the sage heard them, he envisioned his own demise, fallen and dying miserably. Having already witnessed the overwhelming prowess of Yuder Aile against other Awakeners, erasing such an image from his mind was impossible.

No longer having any human shields to offer, nor needing to worry about the aftermath of unleashing his powers, he faced an Awakener, an opponent with no constraints.

Could there be an easier or simpler adversary?

Whether it actually happened or not, it was crucial that the person involved was made to think that he, the sage was the guy who could get away with it. In a rush, the Sage raised his hand.

“Wait, please. I do not know what the Cavalry has discovered about this person, but not everything they know might be true. The Cavalry isn’t established for the benefit of Awakeners, is it? Driving people to this and threatening them is…!”

Thud.

In that instant, the ground beneath the sage collapsed, and he fell into it.

Screaming involuntarily and squeezing his eyes shut, the sage soon realized that he was buried in the ground up to his neck, his head throbbing with shame, shock, and fear.

“What is this…..!”

“Grandpa, you’re lucky to still have your head after spouting nonsense in front of Yuder.”

“It’s because Ever decided to handle you that you were even spared. There’s nothing left but to capture and interrogate you.”

The Eldore siblings began to fuss, pulling a suspiciously stained cloth from their pockets. The sage, smelling its foul odor, turned deathly pale.

Shaking his head and struggling to move his buried body, he was met with Yuder’s cold voice.

“Speak only what is relevant. But if you utter anything useless, I’ll consider it an attempt to use your powers.”

What would follow was clearly indicated by Ever, who, with cold lavender eyes cast downward, clenched her fists. Yuder’s glance toward Ever suggested as much.

“I know what your ability is, and its activation conditions, so don’t even think about it.”

His buried body ached, and his bones felt as if they were shattered. The sage, who had lived comfortably before his awakening and enjoyed the best of life after his awakening thanks to his brainwashed followers, was experiencing such agony for the first time.

He spat out the sleet that had entered his mouth, his face a picture of misery, and cried out.

“This person can tell you things that would be more helpful than Nahan.”

“Why would you tell me that?”

To Yuder’s counter-question, the sage hastily turned his gaze to Ever. Ever’s lips curled up in an odd expression.

“Really? Things that would be helpful?”

“Yes, that’s right. This person is….”

“This person, you say.”

At Yuder’s seemingly meaningless mutter, the sage quickly changed the way he referred to himself.

“It’s me! I am different. Nahan might only have told you about internal affairs on the Star of Nagran, but I know stories that will be useful to the Cavalry, to His Grace, Duke Peletta. Truly. Nahan is a man who instinctively opposes noble forces, he’s not in his right mind. Dealing with him will surely harm the Cavalry!”

“Did you say the same to Duke Diarca?”

“No, not at all. I was… ah, at the Bright Palace. And there….”

“You used your powers on the Crown Prince.”

“Wha- how do you know that…”

At Ever’s counter-question, the sage’s mind froze. Ever slowly knelt down to meet the Sage’s eyes and then spoke.

“What else do you think we know? It seems there’s no helpful information, right, Hinn, Finn, just make him shut up.”

Simultaneously, the Eldore siblings forced a cloth into the sage’s mouth. The sage, unable to bear the stinging smell of the cloth, struggled to spit it out and retched.

“No, please…! Ugh… Ugh!”

Despite the act being insignificant compared to the agony he had forced his brainwashed followers to endure, the frail old man crumbled completely, tears and snot running down his face. He was a pitiful sight, far removed from the dignity he once held as the sage.

“Hmm, seems like we need to stuff in more.”

“Wait a bit. It’s somewhat tricky to pry open the jaw without touching it.”

“How about just filling it with dirt?”

“Ah, no!”

Yuder, hearing the terrible screams, glanced indifferently at the source before turning his attention to Ever.

The Eldore siblings were thoroughly breaking the sage’s spirit, providing an opportunity for Yuder to speak.

“Today’s technique you used will be one of the greatest achievements the Cavalry has established.”

“I hoped it would be useful, but that seems like excessive praise.”

“Just continue as you are. The sage is pathetically weak to physical pain. Maintain this state, extract any useful information, and if there’s none, let him faint and leave him until things are settled.”

“Understood.”

In Ever’s smile, there was a mix of triumph from finally capturing the cunning prey they had pursued and deep fatigue. Yet, Ever stood resolutely on both feet.

“We shouldn’t push too hard; he might resort to a desperate measure.”

“A desperate measure?”

“It means he might use the brainwashing method on us, those who did not have much trust in him.”

Though the exact method was unknown, the look in his eyes was telling. Until being outwitted and overwhelmed by Yuder, the sage had been eyeing them, ready to seize any moment of laxity to strike at the Cavalry members.

Yuder concluded that merely rendering the sage unconscious while he continued to boast and bluster was only a temporary measure. Such a man needed to be thoroughly crushed once captured.

“Ah, true. He is dangerously unpredictable… Should we just knock him out now?”

“I think I can answer that. It won’t be necessary.”

Before Yuder could shake his head, the answer came from an unexpected source.

“Everyone’s done well. Sorry for joining only now.”

“Kanna!”

Kanna, having rushed through the sleet, greeted them with a weary smile. She had just arrived and immediately helped Sunz and Emon extract information from the sage’s last brainwashed followers, informing them about the sage’s hidden brainwashing ability.

“Yuder was right. The sage could temporarily brainwash even those who didn’t trust him completely. It’s not an easy technique to use, though. His condition worsened significantly after using that ability.”

“Did you figure out how it’s done?”

“Physical contact with both hands and repeating a specific word, ‘belief,’ three times.”

“That means…”

“In his current state, buried and unable to use his hands, he can’t use it on us.”

Kanna winked playfully. Ever laughed.

“That’s a relief.”

Still, one must be cautious when subduing an Awakener cornered into desperation.

Yuder, having witnessed Hosanna’s escape, decided there was no need for further words and turned his head away. When he finally looked behind him, there was no one there. Only the ash-gray sleet, carried by the fierce wind, obscured his vision.

‘It makes sense. With Hosanna joining, there’s no longer any reason for anyone to hold their position and fight…’

Yet, he wasn’t overly anxious.

If the situation on Nahan’s side had been favorable, it wouldn’t have been this quiet until now.

Somewhere beyond the harsh wind and the thick sleet, Kishiar was there.

That was all that mattered to him. Neither the ominous weather nor the thick sleet were of any concern to Yuder.

‘I can leave the rest to Kanna and Ever now…’

Yuder, without hesitation, enveloped himself in the power of the wind. Had Kanna not grabbed his cloak, he would have already unleashed his power to head towards Kishiar.

“Yuder, wait, there’s something you need to hear!”

“If it’s about Hosanna’s escape route, tell me later.”

“No, it’s not that. It’s information related to Nahan’s identity!”

Only then did Yuder's steps falter momentarily. Seizing the opportunity, Kanna quickly relayed the information.

"First Princess Myra knew who they were."

"That means he is indeed related to the Herne family."

"Yes, but it's not just a distant relation through a branch family, as I initially thought. It's much deeper. Nahan is… the illegitimate child of the current Duke of Herne."

At last, Yuder understood why Kanna deemed it crucial to convey this information, even in such an urgent moment.

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Chapter 834

“Yes, but it’s not just a distant relation through a branch family, as I initially thought. It’s much deeper. Nahan is… the illegitimate child of the current Duke of Herne.”

At last, Yuder understood why Kanna deemed it crucial to convey this information, even in such an urgent moment.

“Is this information confirmed by the Duke of Herne’s side?”

“Not yet. However, the information from First Princess Myra alone seemed sufficient for proof.”

Yuder’s eyebrows twitched slightly.

This meant that Myra had made a choice that an ordinary noble would not, even at the risk of death.

Before Myra, both Revlin and Pruelle had made similar choices, but the situations then and now were similar yet different.

The previous two had a new path as awakened members of the Cavalry after overthrowing their corrupt families. For them, who wanted to leave their families, it was a better path than before.

But not for Myra. Her goal was always to remain in her family and become the next Duchess. The Cavalry couldn’t protect her, with her being a non-Awakener, as surely as the previous two.

Considering Myra’s future, it was more beneficial not to honestly hand over the information to the Cavalry. Or, if she did, it was typical to negotiate several conditions for secrecy before indirectly giving a hint. Even that would have been a fair deal since it wouldn’t have taken long to uncover the truth.

Yet, she chose to honestly disclose the information without any compensation…

‘She must be refusing to shirk responsibility.’

It was rare for someone to choose that path, knowing it could be disadvantageous for their future. Therefore, Yuder was genuinely amazed by this honest choice.

As Yuder pondered, Kanna continued speaking.

“Regarding another illegitimate sibling mentioned in Hosanna’s story, it seems First Princess Myra doesn’t know. From the information I’ve read, the Herne family had so many illegitimate children that it was common, making Nahan’s case peculiar, being raised in captivity despite being a Southern descent bastard.”

Kanna added that this might be because Nahan’s mother was presumed to be of high status in the South.

“An illegitimate child between Duke Herne and the Southern countries aristocracy, certainly someone they’d want to eliminate or prevent from escaping the family.”

Nahan’s mere existence could be a scandal capable of dragging Herne’s prestige through the mud.

“It seems Hosanna knows Nahan is from the Herne family, but Nahan probably doesn’t. Before coming here, I asked First Princess Myra to look into people related to Nahan’s past.”

“Understood. Is that all you have to report?”

“Just that Hossana looked really bad when First Princess Myra briefly encountered him.”

“That would be…”

“Yes. Probably because he used too much power during his escape. I heard he exerted enough strength to break a suppression device.”

After saying this, Kanna bit her lip and murmured almost in a sigh.

“I should have made sure he couldn’t go outside at all when I wasn’t there… I was too complacent.”

As much as Kanna, the reader of information, knew that despair and regret wouldn’t help immediately, and although she appeared similar to usual on the outside, it couldn’t be the same on the inside. Realizing she hadn’t properly detected her charge’s intention to escape and the warning signs must have been a severe shock.

Originally, Yuder had planned to leave immediately upon hearing the information, but upon seeing Kanna’s slightly trembling, firm lips, Yuder found himself unable to simply walk away. He exhaled softly and began to speak.

“If that’s the case, then… I should do more.”

“Why you, Yuder? You just managed to hold off the sage, and now, with the Commander handling Nahan on the other side, everything should end well, right?”

“…”

“No?”

Of course, Kanna thought this way because she didn’t know that Yuder was aware of the future.

“Well…”

Yuder was a man who possessed more information than anyone else. He had predicted the internal strife among the Star of Nagran and knew how it would unfold and what end they would meet.

Yet, he had not foreseen that the sage and Nahan would confront each other like this today. The same was true for the danger posed by Hosanna.

Despite being the most knowledgeable about the abilities of the Awakeners present, he had judged it highly unlikely for Hosanna's powers to recover any further. Kanna's complacency was, in effect, his own for entrusting her with Hosanna and leaving.

'But saying that would only make Kanna feel worse.'

He had felt the future he knew diverging from reality since the West, but the deviation had intensified since the day of the unusual crack in the South. And today was the pinnacle of that.

The confrontation between the sage and Nahan had gone not too badly. The Crown Prince, who could have been a significant obstacle, was dealt with early by Gakane, a stroke of unexpected luck. Ever had contributed new techniques to the Cavalry, and so far, no one had been seriously hurt.

But all these were far from the events Yuder had anticipated and prepared for.

Good or bad, everything was full of variables.

Known and unknown elements were mixing together. The future seemed as uncertain as sleet that was neither rain nor snow, growing worse rather than better.

Could he really be sure that his actions and choices today were the best possible paths he could have taken?

Yuder swallowed all these thoughts and spoke plainly.

"Anyway, the Commander would have likely given a positive assessment just for the fact that neither you nor the other members were hurt during Hosanna's escape. That's certain."

"Is that so?"

“If he had escaped, we would just capture him. That’s why we are here.”

“That’s true.”

Finally, Kanna smiled genuinely.

“Yes, so…”

It was at that moment.

Thoom…

Before Yuder could finish his sentence, an immense pressure, as if the entire space was being compressed, was felt from somewhere.

A sensation as if an invisible force was beating both the sky and the earth swept through, followed by a fierce wind and screams.

“What, what is…?!”

“Ugh!”

“OH

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*

*!”

Instinctively exerting his strength, Yuder protected his colleagues within his line of sight and supported Kanna, who nearly fell while staggering.

‘…Just now, that was.’

Was it the aftermath of the power emanating from where Kishiar was?

Without a second thought, Yuder looked around and shouted loudly.

“I will go to where the Commander is. Be prepared for any sudden changes!”

As he finished speaking, a golden light burst from his left eye. Responding to his intention to find the connected party, multiple threads of fate extended in all directions.

Yuder propelled himself off the ground, sprinting towards the destination indicated by the golden threads.

‘Kishiar is not alone. Gakane and Kurga are there too, and above all, the enemy is not in a good state. It won’t be an easy opponent, but our side is much more advantageous.’

He knew all too well how strong they were, having seen their might firsthand.

Yuder Aile, even from his previous life, considered them beings difficult to defeat, regardless of his actions. Even if Kishiar couldn’t fully utilize his power, he was already formidable, and now, his vessel had recovered incomparably more than before.

Losing would have been the real surprise.

He knew this, but still, he couldn’t be at ease without seeing it with his own eyes.

As he ran, unhesitatingly following the guidance of the golden thread, the wind and sleet striking his body intensified. Nonetheless, the intangible thread didn’t lose its light, allowing him to advance without difficulty and finally reach his destination.

“…”

‘What is this?’

Yuder stopped in his tracks, staring at the massive black curtain unfolding before him.

It was essentially a black wall, obscuring everything inside it.

However, as he calmed his surprise and looked closely, he realized that the guiding golden thread led into it.

‘And… this curtain itself feels somehow familiar.’

He reached out, touching it lightly, and then it dawned on him.

‘This is… Gakane’s shadow.’

He had never seen it displayed like this before, so it was hard to be certain just by sight.

But it was unmistakable. It was indeed Gakane’s shadow that he had seen so often during their long training sessions.

‘He could use it in this way…?’

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Chapter 835

‘This is… Gakane’s shadow.’

He had never seen it displayed like this before, so it was hard to be certain just by sight.

But it was unmistakable. It was indeed Gakane’s shadow that he had seen so often during their long training sessions.

‘He could use it in this way…?’

Gakane had developed the ability to transform his shadow clone into various forms through training, but this was unprecedented.

Yuder circled around it, inspecting closely. During this process, he found several members of the Star of Nagran’s Awakeners, subdued and lying prostrate. Among them, neither Nahan nor Hosanna were present.

‘Instead… I found this one.’

Yuder looked indifferently down at the unconscious Diemon sprawled on the ground.

His face, now aged into middle years, faintly reminded Yuder of his previous life where Diemon assumed the identity of the sage. The thought that such an insignificant creature had become a nightmare, devouring the empire after the fall of the Star of Nagran, struck him as absurdly funny.

Perhaps the essence of what we consider evil is not as grandiose as we think. Mold, easily removed when sparse, becomes untamable, engulfing everything when it spreads across a whole house. Maybe this was similar to Diemon.

The same could be said not only for Diemon but also for the real sage, Karl Enfile. Both driven by selfish desires, lacking any profound convictions or

purposes.

The reality of these once-feared beings was, in truth, so pitiful.

Yuder genuinely felt relieved to have caught them before they grew any larger, as he buried Diemon in the ground.

‘This should do. The ones following will find him easily enough to take him away.’

Turning his gaze away from Diemon buried in the ground, Yuder refocused on Gakane’s shadow curtain. Initially, it seemed like a completely new technique, but on closer inspection, it appeared otherwise.

‘I remember Gakane using a technique to cloak something in shadow for stealth. Of course, this is on a much larger scale.’

Yuder recalled that Gakane’s shadow cloak technique was similar yet different from Emun Philang’s ability, now the head of the Western branch.

Unlike Emun’s ability to blend into darkness, becoming undetectable while hidden, Gakane’s involved overlaying shadows on the target, making it perceptible from the outside.

Just like the curtain before his eyes.

‘And… there’s one more thing.’

Gakane’s technique had a unique feature: unless you were Gakane himself, the owner of the shadows, it was impossible to remove the stealth state from inside or outside. The shadow clone could withstand external attacks, sustaining little damage, and could last until Gakane himself was defeated.

But what if it was deliberately made on such a large scale?

There’s a prejudice that stealth abilities work better on a smaller scale, but overturning that, a disadvantage can become an advantage.

After considering this, Yuder reached a conclusion.

‘So, this is like a temporary prison created using Gakane’s abilities.’

How it was possible to create such a large barrier remained unknown, but there it was, right before his eyes.

It was probably the best move the Cavalry could play against Hosanna, who had teleportation abilities.

Yuder was almost certain that Kishiar must have been involved in this, considering the quietness of his battlefront since this was created.

‘Since I’ve identified its nature, it’s time to enter, but how?’

The conventional method would be to ask Gakane to open a gap. However, Gakane, who had created the curtain, was inside, making normal communication impossible. Nor could he just use any ability to disrupt it, as it might harm his allies who could be in battle inside.

Waiting for them to come out was never an option.

‘Then the only remaining method is one.’

Having observed Gakane over time, Yuder knew well the weaknesses and limits of his shadow clone. Shadows, by their nature, were weak to light, and intense light would weaken the affected area.

Of course, today’s weather was foul with no sunlight, and there were no objects nearby that could produce light. But if there was none, he would make it.

In an instant, flames spiraled around Yuder, gathering into a ball. The flames, compacting and intensifying, began to change color rapidly - from red to white to blue - emitting a fierce light.

Whoooosh!

Even as the dazzling flames melted the surrounding sleet into steam, Yuder watched, seemingly unaffected by the heat.

His gaze was fixed solely on the part of the shadow curtain that the light touched.

Soon after, a part of the shadow curtain touched by the flickering light began to fade and waver.

“Now!”

It was a momentary opportunity, but Yuder sharply seized it. Pushing his leg towards the weakened part, he felt a slight resistance before his body was swiftly sucked in.

It was as if he had plunged into a pitch-black swamp, the darkness flickering before his eyes.

When he opened his eyes again, he was in complete darkness. No one was visible, and no sound could be heard.

Yuder, feeling a tension enveloping his entire body, cautiously spoke out.

“Commander.”

His voice sounded faint and muffled, as if speaking underwater.

“Gakane, Kurga, answer me.”

No response came from his comrades either.

The golden thread he had followed here was now nowhere to be seen in this place.

It felt suffocating, as if all senses - sight, hearing, touch - were half-paralyzed. Perhaps his senses were not functioning well in this space, a part of Gakane’s shadow ability.

After waiting a moment for any sign of movement, Yuder exhaled and moved forward, ready to attack at any sudden appearance.

Suddenly, he spotted someone lying prostrate. Approaching closer, Yuder realized that the person had familiar golden hair.

Thump.

Was that heavy sound a thud in his ears or a beating from his own heart?

Without looking back, Yuder swiftly approached and knelt down. He lifted the upper body of the fallen person, his mind blank.

The disheveled golden hair shifted, revealing a smooth cheek, a forehead, and closed eyes. The man's face, looking as if asleep, was unmistakably Kishiar La Orr.

"…"

Yuder's hands, holding the man, froze, motionless. His eyes, gazing down at the face, also stopped, not blinking.

Time stood still.

The space began to collapse.

It was at that moment when everything around Yuder Aile seemed to entangle and sink into darkness like terrible debris.

The golden light that had faded in his left eye suddenly flickered, reacting to something.

'…Ah.'

Yuder, reflexively blinking, suddenly noticed something peculiar about the man he was holding, something he hadn't realized immediately.

'The clothes, they're different.'

The Kishiar who had attended the funeral with him today had been wearing a sleek, subtly shining black formal suit. But the clothes on the man before him were not those.

Not the familiar white Cavalry Commander’s uniform Yuder knew so well, nor his usual casual attire, but in a way, very familiar clothes,

They were the garments Kishiar La Orr had worn in his previous life, in the last moments as he sat in Peletta Castle, embracing death.

The moment Yuder realized this, the man in his arms opened his eyes.

His red pupils softly swirled as they focused on Yuder.

“Yes, Yudrain.”

His voice was sweet and enchanting, as if bewitching.

“It’s the first life you’ve reaped with those hands, it would be slightly upsetting, even for me, not to recognize it.”

As he spoke, the man extended his hand.

Yuder, before the man’s fingertips could touch his cheek, jolted up in shock.

The man, who fell back to the ground like a broken doll, burst into laughter. Yuder’s own voice had seemed muffled, as if submerged in water, but his voice felt distinctly etched in his mind.

“Will you discard me as soon as you recognize me? That’s disappointing.”

“…”

“It seemed like we had quite an interesting relationship…”

His laughter waned and then grew louder repeatedly. Amidst the incessant laughter, the man’s body gradually crumbled like ash.

In the end, only one thing remained.

Two hands, wearing white gloves, covering every inch of skin.

And Yuder, looking down at them, was finally certain.

This was an illusion created by Nahan.

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Chapter 836

‘Damn it,’ he cursed under his breath.

Nahan’s illusions were peculiar in their nature, capable of stirring the deepest fears in the minds of their victims. Unlike most, these illusions were not crafted by Nahan himself, but rather were the creations of the targets’ own minds, which made them all the more insidious and effective.

Yuder had once before encountered a similar illusion in the East. Just like now, Kishiar from his past life had appeared within that illusion.

Although the actions and words within the illusion might have varied, its core purpose remained unchanged: to ensnare and subdue its target by coercing a response. Had Yuder been disconcerted or caught up in Kishiar’s words within the illusion, his mind would have been swiftly overwhelmed.

‘To encounter an illusion right upon entering, it’s utterly absurd…’

Yet, despite knowing it was an illusion, its ability to profoundly disturb the mind was its cursed strength. The more one’s spirit wavered, the more the mind eroded, making escape increasingly difficult.

‘Mine must have been somewhat eroded already.’

When he first saw Kishiar lying there, he had been utterly thoughtless. His rational mind had ceased without a sign, unable to even conjure the usual skepticism. He was so startled that he hadn’t immediately noticed the difference in clothes.

Even now, confident that it was an illusion, the dreadful sensation of that moment lingered, draining his energy and causing a headache. Despite knowing he should ignore it, it was hard to avert his eyes from the fluttering white hand before him.

‘Nahan, even in a near-death state, how could he conjure such a powerful illusion?’

In some ways, this illusion felt stronger than the one he had seen in the East. He wondered if Kishiar, Gakane, and Kurga were safe in such a situation.

‘If they too are caught in this illusion…’

‘No,’ Yuder clenched his teeth and fists. He couldn’t afford to entertain thoughts that only fueled his anxiety in this already desperate situation. The more he reacted and wavered, the stronger and more potent the illusion became. He desperately cleared his mind and focused on other thoughts.

‘The fastest way out would be to attack the caster, but he’s nowhere to be seen. The only other option is…’

Yuder gazed at his own hand.

When he previously faced Nahan’s illusion, he had escaped by tearing his arm. Since the location was outside, it was possible to break the scope of Nahan’s ability and strike back as revenge for seeing his blood.

But now, after the incidents in the West, he could no longer resort to inflicting wounds upon himself as a means of escape.

Destroying it was such a simple act, yet Yuder, with reluctance, lowered his hand.

‘There must be another way.’

A method of breaking through the space with sheer force.

However, he hesitated to unleash a pillar of fire in this space, wary that it might be wrapped in Gakane’s powers. Perhaps this was a trap, using Yuder’s strength against him, a ploy of the enemy to escape the current predicament.

‘The most moderate approach would be… to do as Nathan Zuckerman did.’

Nathan Zuckerman had shattered Nahan's illusion in the West with unwavering determination. Despite being human with inherent fears, he had decisively proved that these fears were irrelevant to his present self, enabling a swift escape.

But even knowing that, it was a difficult method to replicate. Nathan Zuckerman and Yuder were fundamentally different from the start. If Yuder could have confronted Nahan in the same way, he wouldn't have resorted to tearing his arm in the East, enduring the tremendous expenditure of power to create a pillar of flame.

Those methods, though effective in delivering a significant blow to Nahan, in fact represented a way of avoiding the situation itself - the denial and destruction of the illusion of Kishiar.

'…'

Reflecting on it, he realized he had always been exceptionally weak when it came to matters involving Kishiar.

It was a time when he had kept his heart closed to himself, unwilling to acknowledge even a hint of emotion. Yet, the presence of Kishiar La Orr lingered in the deepest recesses of his heart, binding him inexorably, rendering him incapable of moving forward.

'Damn it.'

The fact that he couldn't choose the fastest method of escape, tearing his own hand, was because of this.

Without Kishiar, what could possibly shake him?

Such a ludicrous, fake scenario of him lying there, defeated.

Those silent hands, what were they…

Yuder, pressing down on his throbbing head, bowed.

It was then that he noticed the golden string on his ceremonial robe.

A simple, decorative string, yet the sight of it suddenly brought to mind a voice he had recently heard.

“When a single string exists, the beginning and end seem like opposites. But when these two meet…”

The decorative string, intertwined between the buttons, formed a circle.

“The moment the beginning and end meet, we can no longer distinguish between them. They turn and cycle together, eternally.”

Coincidentally, or perhaps it was Kishiar’s intention, the color of the string matched exactly what Kishiar had shown him before.

That day, watching the flickering flames of the magic stone stove, the sensation of lying overlapped on the sofa, vividly resurfaced.

The warmth at his back, the gentle hands that wrapped around his waist, softly caressing.

The low, tender voice echoing in his ears.

The warmth and an indescribable, poignant sensation that touched the deepest part of him.

Yuder slowly grasped the string with his fingers.

As he held the circle formed by the knot in his hand, his dizzy head began to clear, and the entangled mess seemed to fly away.

The shock of seeing Kishiar’s illusion lying defeated.

The provocative remarks from the voice within the illusion.

And the anxiety and anger towards himself for almost being shaken by it, despite knowing better.

All that disappeared, leaving only one thing behind.

Even if the beginning and the end are indistinguishable, connected things always remain in place.

So, even in this unseen, unheard darkness, knowing just that,

"…"

Yuder closed his eyes deeply and then opened them.

The illusion of the hand in the white glove, which seemed about to reach him any moment, vanished like a lie, and there stood a person before him.

The golden threads of light, thought to have disappeared the moment he entered the shadow curtain, wrapped around him, softly dancing and fluttering.

In that fantastical scene visible to no one but Yuder, Kishiar, clad in a black ceremonial robe, reached out and embraced him. Yuder, without a word, slowly raised his hand and embraced him in return.

After taking a few breaths in this embrace, words finally began to flow.

"I have dealt with the sage. I came here because I suddenly felt a pressure that seemed to shake the heavens and the earth from this side, and when I didn't see you or the others, I forced my way in."

"I see, that must have been worrying, with only the shadow wall erected."

Kishiar's voice was, as always, smooth and composed. It was the same voice as in the illusion, but the words he spoke were entirely different. That's when the reality of the situation sank in.

"I was worried when I first entered and saw the space created by the illusion power… but I'm relieved to see that you're alright, Commander."

"There were some complications, but it was manageable. I was concerned when I sensed someone intruding before I could finish everything, but fortunately, it seems you've managed to escape."

The man lightly squeezed Yuder's shoulder and then released him from the embrace. Only then did Yuder realize that he hadn't just been holding him, but had been checking his condition.

"It's good to see you're not injured."

Although Kishiar must have guessed that Yuder had seen Nahan's illusion, he didn't ask about its content. It was as if he knew that Yuder being unharmed meant that, unlike before, he had escaped the illusion on his own without injuring himself.

"What exactly happened?"

"It's a bit of a long story, but let's go join the others first, and I'll explain on the way."

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Chapter 837

“It’s a bit of a long story, but let’s go join the others first, and I’ll explain on the way,” Kishiar said, striding confidently into the darkness. Yuder followed closely by his side, listening intently to his words.

“At first, the only issue was luring Nahan out, which wasn’t too difficult actually. Perhaps because he’s exceptionally quick-witted, as soon as he faced me, he almost guessed what was happening,” Kishiar recounted.

Unlike Yuder, who had immediately charged and subdued the sages’ Awakeners, Kishiar’s side hadn’t engaged in battle straight away. First, those following Nahan, unlike the brainwashed, possessed both instinct and reason. Secondly…

“Weren’t the Cavalry collaborating with the sage to capture us?” asked Nahan. His assessment of the situation was quicker than the sage’s.

“Well, what do you think?” Kishiar didn’t give a clear answer, but it was enough for Nahan to piece together much of the truth.

“So, the so-called collaboration list was merely a bait to ensnare us all,” Nahan deduced.

“I’d like to clarify first that bait doesn’t necessarily mean a lie. There were those who genuinely helped us. You probably know who they are,” Kishiar added.

Just hearing this, Nahan knew who they were - his companions who had been left behind.

However, the others present didn’t understand these cryptic words. They looked at Nahan in confusion, puzzled by the talk of bait and familiar people.

“Is the sage… I mean, did the sage’s side really do that?” they questioned.

“Who among Nahan’s acquaintances would collaborate with the Cavalry? Those who were captured by them were all…!” they wondered, reflecting on their unwavering unity and faith in Nahan.

They had always worried deeply about the fate of their comrades captured by the Cavalry. Were they dead, imprisoned, or something else entirely? These questions had long gone unanswered, leaving them to accept vague rumors as the truth.

But what if that wasn’t the case?

Kishiar’s words were like a stone cast into the still waters of their buried doubts, creating ripples. Even the smallest stone could cause ripples far wider and deeper than its size.

The atmosphere didn’t drastically change with this revelation, but Kishiar knew that to confront Nahan, this issue had to be shaken first.

“The sage’s abuse of power has been fully confirmed by the Cavalry as well. He’ll soon be captured by my assistant and pay for his crimes. And the same goes for you, Nahan,” Kishiar declared.

“My crimes?” Nahan tilted his head, questioning.

“My crimes… What are they? The sin of being the sole survivor? The sin of fighting for my suffering brethren? Or perhaps the sin of clearing away the useless trash and dirt of this world?” Nahan’s expression grew increasingly impassive as he spoke, his voice quickening with suppressed rage and madness.

“Don’t act so high and mighty, Cavalry Commander. You, who have lived a life of luxury. What right do you have to determine the price of that pain and punish it? Does your authority come from the Emperor’s orders? Is it righteous when you do the same, but a sin when we do it? Is that the belief of the nobles of the Cavalry who claim to serve the Awakeners? Do we not even have the right to seek vengeance?”

Emotions among people are contagious, and Nahan possessed a unique talent for spreading the fervor of his own thirst for revenge to others.

“No, the right to revenge is something one decides for oneself. I have no intention of conforming to your standards. We will continue to retaliate against those who trampled over us. That’s why we’re here, after all!”

“Nahan…!”

A chorus of Awakeners reacted instantly to Nahan’s voice, brimming with dark anger. Their eyes trembled as Nahan released Diemon, whom he had been clutching, and utilized his power.

“Strike at the first opening!” he commanded.

Blood, mingled with pain, surged out of his mouth, but it was alright. Nahan knew his capabilities well. His power of illusion worked within a designated range, and he alone knew where it began and ended. While one could break free once caught, avoiding it entirely was impossible.

Even Kishiar La Orr, whom Nahan had encountered in the West, had momentarily shown a weakness under the power of his illusions. Kishiar might be arrogant, relying on having broken free and injuring Nahan’s arm back then, but this time, Nahan wouldn’t be caught off guard.

Nahan knew the nature of the terrifying illusion that was based on Kishiar’s mind. Surprisingly, it had taken the form of Yuder Aile, currently battling the sage in the distance.

Therefore, instead of creating a new illusion, Nahan intended to use the image of Yuder Aile he had seen before to bind Kishiar, even if only momentarily.

But…

The Awakeners’ reflexive attacks towards the stationary Kishiar were futile, blocked by the bright blue aura emanating from his sword. Gasps of shock echoed around them.

“A swordmaster?”

“…How?”

Despite being within the range of Nahan’s illusion, Kishiar stood with his eyes wide open, fending off the Awakeners.

The ability had been executed correctly, but Kishiar moved freely, unaffected by any illusion.

Kishiar just smiled at the unexpected situation facing the perplexed Nahan.

“Guess how I did it?” he taunted, effortlessly deflecting multiple attacks with smooth, seemingly effortless strokes of his sword.

Nahan’s eyes grew fiercer.

“Don’t be fooled by what looks like sword aura; it’s a common trick!”

The Awakeners, unaware of the rumor that Duke Peletta had become the new swordmaster, tried to rationalize the shock in the simplest way they could understand.

Unable to halt the already initiated attack, those infected by Nahan’s anger exerted their full power. Diemon, injured in the arm, could not join the fray and crawled on the ground, screaming.

Kishiar, appearing to deliberately show this to Nahan, barely moved from his spot, focusing solely on defense. None of the attacks could reach past him to where Yuder and the sage were.

It was as if his very presence formed an impenetrable wall.

Blood vessels burst in Nahan’s enraged eyes. As he gritted his teeth and amplified his power, the air around Kishiar trembled and distorted in a spectrum of colors.

“That is…!”

The illusions meant for Kishiar alone layered and intensified to such an extent that the entire space began to warp under their influence.

In a moment when everyone was overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of his power, Nahan once again spat out a clot of blood.

“Nahan!”

“Don’t look this way, attack! Find a way past the Cavalry Commander to the other side!” he shouted.

Following Nahan’s cry, the Awakeners launched their attacks toward Kishiar, who was trapped in the twisted air. Some took advantage of the chaos to move toward where the sage and Yuder were.

However, just as someone tried to cross the area where Kishiar stood, the tip of his sword, surrounded by a blue aura, pierced through the distorted air.

“Argh!”

Along with it, an invisible force spread widely, pushing back everyone in the vicinity. Nahan, resisting the force pushing him away, eventually rolled backward, unable to withstand the impact, and vomited blood.

“Ugh…!”

“Commander!”

Nahan raised his head. Two members of the Cavalry, who had been waiting in the distance, were now rushing towards Kishiar.

Emerging from the shattered illusion, Kishiar looked unscathed, unlike the others. Though his ornate attire was somewhat damaged, that was all. An Awakener murmured in astonishment at the sight of him standing firm, unblemished by a single drop of blood on his pale cheek.

“What was that just now…?”

The power he exhibited was unlike any ability they had ever seen or experienced. It was an overwhelming force, too immense to be merely attributed to the skills of a master swordsman.

And then, Nahan realized.

“I thought he was just a swordsman pretending to be a swordmaster, but that wasn’t it.”

That was the true power of an Awakener possessed by Cavalry Commander Kishiar La Orr.

“So, the reason you weren’t affected by Nahan’s illusions was because of that power?” asked Yuder, who had been listening to the story.

Kishiar nodded lightly.

“Yes, I used the pushing force.”

“How exactly did you do it?”

Driven by curiosity, Yuder couldn’t help but ask. Fortunately, Kishiar was willing to explain.

“I already knew that his illusion power worked only within a certain range. If you know where and when it will be used, you can prepare for it in advance, right?”

“So… you didn’t move to ensure that Nahan targeted only your location?”

“Exactly. If he had continuously changed the range, it would have been difficult to counter it to that extent.”

Kishiar revealed that he had been pondering this method since his first encounter with Nahan. It was the first time he had applied it in a real battle, and he was relieved it worked. A faint smile appeared on his face as he murmured, “In fact, I only realized I could apply my power to things that are invisible thanks to you. If it weren’t for that, I might still be using this power only on visible things.”

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Chapter 838

“In fact, I only realized I could apply my power to things that are invisible thanks to you. If it weren’t for that, I might still be using this power only on visible things.”

Yuder remembered distinctly when Kishiar first applied his power to the invisible. It was during an experiment when Yuder had inserted a part of his Awakener power into Kishiar’s body.

“Why would that be my doing? It was all due to your own attempts and achievements, Commander.”

“Not at all. Do you know what I felt was most crucial in developing this power?”

“…No, I don’t.”

“Whether the target of my power is visible or not, tangible or not, turned out to be not so important. The real difference came from whether I believed I could do it or not. In fact, that was the hardest part for me.”

Believing in oneself is a difficult task, especially for a man who grew up learning to always doubt his strength, his body, and the path he was on.

Yuder recalled how many times Kishiar had said something similar.

“What I needed then was not to forget that there was someone who believed in me with more certainty than I ever could. So, this is indeed all thanks to you.”

Yuder remained silent. From experience, he knew that anything more he said would only lead Kishiar to further embellish his argument.

‘But truly… it’s remarkable. Back then, it was merely about barely pulling a faint flow of an intangible power.’

He had felt the power leap forward when healing Emperor Keilusa, but even then, it wasn’t to this extent. If it’s to the point where even Nahan’s abilities can’t get caught in or escape this power, one can’t even imagine how far Kishiar will develop this ability in the future.

Perhaps a new method of breaking mental abilities will be created, likely only possible by Kishiar himself. If he becomes able to influence other intangible things as well…

‘This is even more than Kishiar in my previous life…’

Yuder, lost in his imagination, suddenly paused, led by a voice that unexpectedly emerged from his memory.

“…It will soon end. Pushing it until every connection is forcibly severed… And then…”

Had Kishiar in his previous life really never used his ability on an intangible target?

At least in Yuder’s vivid memories, that seemed to be the case. But then, he remembered that in a dream he had while in the West, Kishiar had faintly uttered something similar in his final moments.

‘Yes… definitely, he did.’

Why had he half-forgotten it again? He had a similar experience before, but this time it felt particularly suffocating. Was it because he now clearly understood the content of those remembered words?

Pushing it until every connection is forcibly severed.

Pushing.

If ‘pushing’ referred to his ability, then the connection Kishiar was pushing away must naturally have been something like the golden thread between them.

If you stretch a thread to its limits, no matter how strong, it will inevitably break.

But what happens after that?

Did Kishiar really use that power then?

Had the connection, the thread, been severed?

What happened. What happened next?…….

Just as he felt the gaping voids within his chest stir, about to speak out.

“…Yuder?”

Startled by the hand on his shoulder, Yuder lifted his head.

“I thought you had fallen into a trance again since you stopped suddenly without a word. Are you alright?”

“Uh…”

Only then did Yuder realize he had unknowingly stopped walking. His blurry focus finally sharpened.

“I’m fine. Where did you leave off in your story?”

“I was saying that when we almost caught Nahan, Hosanna arrived.”

Hearing Hosanna’s name nudged Yuder’s cloudy mind back into motion.

“Ah… I saw that too when Hosanna arrived.”

“…Yes.”

The man, who had been watching Yuder, slowly began to speak again. Despite discussing something important, Yuder’s mind was haunted by the thought that just occurred to him, chilling him like a sudden shiver. The voice from that dark time remained…

“…”

Yuder lifted his head again, expecting Kishiar to continue speaking, but found him silently observing him instead.

The red irises, sinking into the silence, disappeared behind the eyelids and then reappeared.

“It seems there’s a reason you suddenly can’t concentrate. Is it something difficult to discuss with me?”

After a moment’s hesitation, Yuder spoke up.

“You might find this question absurd, but… may I ask you something?”

“There’s no way I’d find anything you ask absurd. What is it?”

“About your power, Commander. Do you think it could apply to the… indescribable thread-like thing that connects us?”

It must have been a completely unexpected question for Kishiar. Yet, instead of questioning why Yuder asked it, the man pondered, tilting his head as if weighing his thoughts, then inquired about something else entirely.

“Well… I’m not sure, but is it something we need to try right now? If so, I’ll make an effort.”

“No. That’s not it.”

Yuder quickly shook his head in denial. Just the idea of trying it made his heart chill for a moment.

“I was just curious if you could. You could even block Nahan’s power. Just an answer will suffice.”

Kishiar, with his arms crossed, faintly lifted the corners of his lips and then let out a thoughtful hum.

“I could block Nahan’s power because I had once suffered under that man’s ability and spent time thinking about and practicing countermeasures. But with this, it’s hard to be certain. It sometimes appears like a thread, so it might not be impossible with effort…….”

“….”

“Still, if you asked me to try it right now, I can’t guarantee success. Let’s leave it at that.”

As expected.

If the current Kishiar deemed it not impossible, then Kishiar in his previous life could have reached that point too. The answer after attempting it remained unknown, but… hearing this response somewhat calmed Yuder’s heart. He breathed deeply and nodded.

“I see. Understood.”

“Is this enough for you?”

“For now… it seems so.”

“Alright, then.”

Uncharacteristically for Yuder, he accepted the man’s vague reply with a refreshing answer, and soon, the man softly shifted his approach.

“I’ll start again from the part where Hosanna arrived. Is that alright with you?”

The skillful change of subject, a hallmark of Kishiar, always brought a sense of relief at the moments it was most needed. This time, amidst the surrounding darkness, was no different.

Yuder swallowed his appreciation for this quiet consideration and nodded.

“Yes.”

“In fact, none of us expected Hosanna to appear there, and I was no exception. I was a bit late in responding, and Hosanna almost got away with Nahan in the chaos.”

Had Hosanna been in full condition, perhaps he might have succeeded.

But just like Nahan, who was vomiting blood until his front was soaked, Hosanna was not in a good state either.

Before anyone could react, Hosanna had managed to grab him and use his ability, but when they reappeared, they were only a few trees’ distance from the original location.

“They’re over there!”

Gakane shouted quickly. Simultaneously, Hosanna used his ability again, but this time too, they flickered into view not far away.

Nahan’s fellow Awakeners chased after them, with Kishiar, Gakane, and Kurga following in pursuit.

The sleet grew denser, and the sky darkened. Despite knowing Hosanna’s ability was not being fully utilized, locating them immediately was not easy.

Still, Kishiar opened his exceptional senses as a swordmaster, focusing intently on his hearing. From the temple’s dark backside, near the forest, faint crying sounds were heard.

“…Young Master. Please, come to your senses. It’s me. I’ve come, I’m here….”

“…”

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Chapter 839

Still, Kishiar opened his exceptional senses as a swordmaster, focusing intently on his hearing. From the temple's dark backside, near the forest, faint crying sounds were heard.

"…Young Master. Please, come to your senses. It's me. I've come, I'm here…."

"…"

Hosanna and Nahan, having fully exited the temple grounds, were heading deeper into the forest, making them increasingly difficult to locate. Kishiar paused to exercise caution, then quietly instructed Gakane and Kurga, who were closely following him.

"Kurga, the suppression of the other Awakeners is almost complete. Finish it. Three to the right rear, two behind the diagonal wall on the left, and probably one more nearby. Return as soon as you're done."

"Understood."

Kurga, with agility that belied his large frame, vanished swiftly.

"And Gakane."

"Yes!"

"Weren't you skilled in stealth techniques? What exactly was your ability?"

Kishiar's memory of even the minor skills surprised Gakane, who responded with awe.

"My stealth skill involves cloaking the target in shadows. It's similar to Emon's ability, but it's somewhat difficult to move freely in that state…"

“Good.”

Gakane’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Excuse me?”

“That skill will be used, but not on us.”

“What do you mean…”

Gakane had assumed Kishiar intended to stealthily capture Nahan and Hosanna. However, Kishiar explained their current location to Gakane and instructed:

“From now, we’ll split up and meet again near where Nahan and Hosanna are. But don’t join me immediately upon finding them. Stay hidden, no matter what I do, and use your ability on them when I signal. Can you do that?”

Gakane, gauging his ability, glanced at his hands and then nodded deeply after a moment’s thought.

“So, you intend to use my stealth skill to trap them. I believe I can… No, I will certainly do as you command.”

A firm resolve ignited in his green eyes. Kishiar nodded in response, then gestured for Gakane to go first. Gakane nodded and turned, heading left.

Kishiar, in contrast, went right. Holding his sword loosely as if on a casual walk, yet he moved with remarkable speed.

Advancing silently, so as not to even disturb the slushy sleet, Kishiar continued to listen intently to the faint voices.

Meanwhile, Nahan seemed to have regained consciousness, as now two voices could be heard.

“This is pointless… Hosanna.”

“Please, Young Master… no more…!”

Following these voices, Kishiar finally spotted two figures in the gray sleet. Nahan was half-collapsed in Hosanna’s embrace, while Hosanna, bent over him, was shaking with sobs.

Kishiar concealed himself in the intensifying sleet. As Gakane had not yet arrived, he stood still for a moment, listening to the conversation between the two.

“You always did this. You’d promise to follow my words, yet in the most crucial moments, you’d make the choice I least wanted,” he said.

“Young Master…”

“I’ve never forgotten what you did on the day everything burned.”

“…”

“Knowing full well it’s why you can’t be my brother, you’re still making the same choice as back then, insisting on saving only me and abandoning everyone else.”

“Young Master, I… Sob. I couldn’t help it. Bringing only you here was all I could do… But you said it was fine to stay by your side as long as I wasn’t a hindrance. My, my abilities are useful… Just a bit more recovery and I’ll surely, I can move us farther, so just wait a little, and I’ll bring others too…!”

Nahan looked at the pleading Hosanna with dry eyes.

“I don’t need it.”

His voice was terribly dry, filled with hatred for everything. Hosanna flinched unknowingly, and Nahan continued with a laugh.

“I don’t need you or your abilities. All I want is revenge. My own revenge, not anyone else’s.”

“Young… Master…”

“I didn’t hope for your return, nor did I ever ask you to save me. Go. Don’t manipulate me with your desires anymore.”

With a gagging sound, Nahan coughed up blood. Hosanna reached for him, crying out, but Nahan coldly brushed his hand away.

Kishiar watched this, eyeing the blurred other side hidden by the sleet. Gakane was near. He had arrived and was skillfully concealing his presence.

All that was needed now was a brief moment when Hosanna couldn’t use her ability.

“I thought I told you to leave.”

“No, Young Master, please… I won’t ask for surrender anymore. I was wrong. Just, let us escape together…! I never dreamed the sage was such a person. Truly.”

“Go”

“But Young Master, you don’t really mean it. I know. Sob. The revenge you speak of, it’s all because of Matiang…”

“Don’t speak that name!”

As Nahan shouted, Kishiar felt the turbulent flow of energy bursting from him. Overwhelmed by the harsh tide of anger, Hosanna choked and tumbled.

Without further hesitation, Kishiar raised his hand to signal Gakane and stepped forward.

Now!

He moved swiftly, as if the world around him slowed, grabbing Hosanna from behind. As he separated Hosanna and Nahan, Gakane’s shadow spread

wide, engulfing Nahan.

The suppression seemed perfect.

But then, the shadow writhed and, with a silent explosion, tore apart.

“Ugh…!”

Gakane screamed, stifled, and fell to his knees. Torn shadows allowed streams of chaotic energy to flow through.

A massive and intense storm of unbridled power.

The moment Kishiar felt it, a mix of unrestrained hatred and rage, he instinctively understood what it was.

A rampage.

“Ugh… Ughhh!”

“Gakane! Withdraw your power.”

At Kishiar’s command, Gakane, bleeding, shook his head in refusal.

“Ah, it’s impossible. The energy inside is too strong and completely entangled… I mustn’t let go… it’s too dangerous, please get away…!”

With a choked cough, Gakane bled. He struggled to extract and mend the torn shadows, but the energy surging like a storm was too powerful for him to contain alone.

Through the torn shadows, distorted colors and incomplete forms of shadows surged out. They fluttered like ghosts, becoming more numerous and vivid, darkening the sky and intensifying the sleet into a near-blizzard.

Kishiar looked down at Hosanna, whom he held in his hand. He was completely unconscious, his eyes rolled back, breathing barely noticeable as if he might stop breathing any moment. Yet, influenced by Nahan’s energy, his too was becoming increasingly chaotic.

If things continued this way, he might witness two Awakeners in a rampage. Given their powerful abilities, the aftermath of such an event wouldn't be mild.

The danger wasn't just to them. Kishiar's gaze briefly shifted beyond the sleet in a certain direction - where Yuder was facing the sage.

"Commander! Gakane!"

In the critical situation, Kurga rushed in, barely supporting Gakane.

Seeing the escalating sleet and the impending rampage, Kishiar made a decision.

"Kurga, support Gakane. Gakane, from now on, I'll channel my strength to you. Concentrate."

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Chapter 840

Seeing the escalating sleet and the impending rampage, Kishiar made a decision.

“Kurga, support Gakane. Gakane, from now on, I’ll channel my strength to you. Concentrate.”

“…Channel your strength, to me… Commander?”

Apart from Yuder, the members of the team still did not fully understand the extent of Kishiar’s abilities. Doubt-filled gazes converged on him.

“It might be challenging, but I need you to use your stealth technique just once more. That should suffice. You’ll understand the rest without an explanation.”

“…”

Though they could not comprehend his plan, one thing was certain.

Kishiar had never broken a promise to his Cavalry members.

Even if they could not understand, they could trust. Therefore, Gakane and Kurga nodded without further questions.

“I understand. I will try.”

Kurga firmly supported Gakane, who, gasping for breath, stood on his own two feet and began to muster all the remaining strength within him. It was an exhausting task to contain the rampaging Nahan while extracting new strength, but he ultimately succeeded.

“Ugh…!”

The shadow Gakane managed to draw forth was, unfortunately, paler and lesser in comparison to his first attempt. Ashamed, he bowed his head.

“I’m sorry, this is… my limit…!”

“Well done. That’s enough.”

Commending Gakane, Kishiar lightly touched the shadow with his hand.

At that moment, Gakane and Kurga felt a different, overwhelming sensation compared to Nahan’s earlier rampage. An immense yet clearly controlled power flowed from Kishiar.

“Ah…!”

A force, like the hand of a giant, reached out and tightly grasped Gakane’s shadow. Gakane momentarily struggled with an instinctive sense of rejection and fear towards the interfering power.

The unstable, surging shadow calmed down as much as it could, and an invisible force firmly wrapped around it, binding it tightly. It felt like a new framework was being built upon the immobilized shadow.

Gakane, who had been breathing raggedly, finally began to breathe a bit easier.

Understanding Kishiar’s words that they would realize without explanation, Gakane muttered with trembling eyes.

“This is…”

“Now, move as I do. Cooperate. The crucial part starts now.”

Kishiar began manipulating the shadow, pushing and pulling. The tiny shadow quickly elongated, towering high above their heads.

After bringing it to an immense height, Kishiar paused to check on Gakane’s condition. Once he confirmed that Gakane was fine, he exerted his power again.

The shadow, now like an enormous umbrella unfolding, expanded and spread out into a vast black canopy, splitting into several strands as it began to descend.

It was fundamentally the same as Gakane's earlier small shadow stealth technique, but on a scale tens of times larger.

-Boom, boom, boom, boom!

Due to its immense size, the black shadows, resembling a beautiful meteor shower, formed elegant arcs as they collectively covered the ground, a spectacular sight.

Simultaneously, the explosion of tremendous power vibrated the surrounding area.

The shadow, enlarged by Kishiar's power, miraculously did not tear but grew indefinitely, engulfing and swallowing all visible space. As the spread curtain anchored into the ground like stakes, the rampaging energies of Nahan, attempting to escape, screamed terribly.

Grunting in pain, Gakane clenched his teeth and swallowed the blood that surged in his throat. Despite the immense agony, he managed to contain Nahan's rampage and assist Kishiar, showing the same tenacity that had even earned Yuder's admiration.

Thanks to him, Kishiar was able to cast the shadow curtain far wider and more perfect than expected. The rampaging power, screaming in frustration, furiously thrashed in vain trying to break through the shadow.

As the shadow curtain completely enveloped them, the chilling sleet ceased. The weather hadn't cleared; it was a sign that the space within the shadow was completely isolated from the outside.

Now, the outside should be safe.

But inside, it was not.

In the darkness of the vast shadow curtain, Kishiar felt Nahan’s energy, rough and sticky, clawing at his skin.

The forces, clouding one’s mind, clung to and entangled Kishiar’s limbs, calling out to him in a damp and desperate manner.

My son…

Your Highness, Second Prince…

Duke…

Voices that would trap the listener in endless illusions the moment they responded. Kishiar coldly observed these apparitions, taking on the forms of those he cherished or had once cherished, making them all the more alluring.

When he had previously faced Nahan’s power, only Yuder had appeared, but now it was different. The varied attitudes of the apparitions indicated that they were not solely focused on instilling fear. It meant that the rampaging illusionary abilities were even more chaotically distorted.

The random voices, taking shape only to quickly dissipate and then reform, ceaselessly attempted to seduce Kishiar.

Among them, of course, was the voice that would be most effective on Kishiar.

Commander.

A faint figure with a flat, slow voice called out to Kishiar from behind.

Commander, I…

Just as the figure was about to reach out and embrace him from behind, Kishiar closed his eyes and exhaled.

Simultaneously, a burst of power emanated from his body, forcefully repelling all the illusions around him, as decisively as swinging a sword.

With indecipherable screams, the voices faded away. A fierce wind blew. Only after pushing them to their limits did Kishiar finally open his eyes again.

The surroundings were now completely quiet. In the not-so-far distance, he saw Gakane and Kurga, half-collapsed, and Hosanna, unconscious.

“Uh… where is this…?”

Like Kishiar, Gakane and Kurga had suffered from the rampaging illusions, but after Kishiar repelled Nahan’s power, they regained their senses.

“Are you both alright?”

“Yes. I’m fine.”

“I think I’ll be okay after a bit more rest.”

While Kurga seemed less affected by the illusions, Gakane was different. His complexion was as pale as a corpse, likely due to seeing disturbing visions on top of exhausting himself creating the massive shadow curtain.

“Don’t force yourself to move. To maintain this state, your strength needs to remain at the center.”

Kishiar helped Gakane to lie down for rest, then spoke.

“I’ve managed to push out much of Nahan’s energy with my power, but not all of it. So, don’t move from here and wait. I’ll go and check around for a while.”

“But how can we just let the Commander go alone?”

“I’m not going alone; each of us is doing what we can.”

Gakane was the source of the perfect shadow barrier that could contain Nahan in his rampaging state, as well as Hosanna, who was on the brink of one. Therefore, he couldn’t be pushed further. Kurga needed to assist Gakane, who would struggle just to maintain the barrier, while Kishiar

could use his repelling force to move even amidst Nahan's chaotic illusions. This was the best strategy.

"The others must have felt the aftermath just now, so reinforcements should be coming soon… No."

Kishiar, who was explaining, frowned slightly and shook his head.

"…I didn't notice because of the illusions, but it seems someone has breached our location. Do you feel it, Gakane?"

"Ah…"

Only then did Gakane swallow his breath, close his eyes, and concentrate.

"It seems so… Over there, a bit away… Could it be one of the enemies who has entered?"

"Isn't it more likely to be someone from the Cavalry?"

Even though they were in Gakane's shadow, it was difficult to ascertain anything in a space filled with Nahan's energy, barely contained with Kishiar's help. Kishiar spoke to the anxious duo.

"Whoever it is, I doubt they would have been left alone by the rampaging illusions. We'll know when we check."

That was the whole story of how Kishiar came to be here.

"So that's what happened."

After hearing the entire explanation, Yuder exhaled briefly. It was so typical of Kishiar to downplay the entire situation as 'a little trouble but it was fine'.

"It's more than just a little trouble, isn't it?"

"We haven't completely captured Nahan yet, so it's still 'a little'."

“That such a creature rampaged and you’re unharmed is a miracle.”

Had Yuder arrived even a little later, Kishiar would have gone to face the rampaging Nahan alone, in this pitch-black shadow, battling the crazed illusions.

He might seem unscathed on the outside, but that can’t be true inside. Yuder’s golden eyes faintly saw that Kishiar was also quite exhausted.

Even though Gakane was the creator of this space, it was Kishiar who was adding his strength. Moreover, he was protecting Gakane and Kurga inside, and now, on top of that, he was using his abilities to shield both himself and Yuder from the impact of the illusions.

That he had used so much power and was still holding up was honestly a miracle. It wouldn’t have been possible unless Kishiar’s strength and control far exceeded ordinary limits.

Dealing with a rampaging Awakener for too long was never good. Whether for Yuder and his comrades or the opponent, it was crucial to find and resolve the issue as quickly as possible before it became an even greater ordeal.

‘To do that…’

“I have something to say as well. It’s about Hosanna and Nahan. I heard from Kanna just before I came here.”

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Chapter 841

“I have something to say as well. It’s about Hosanna and Nahan. I heard from Kanna just before I came here.”

Yuder organized the story he received from Kanna and conveyed it. Upon learning whose illegitimate child Nahan was, Kishiar’s eyebrows slightly twitched, though he showed no sign of surprise.

“…I see. The bastard of the Herne family.”

“It was fortunate that First Princess Myra remembered them in detail.”

“But why do you choose to convey this information to me at this very moment? Is there another reason?”

Though the information had to be conveyed eventually, Yuder first mentioned it in the midst of Nahan’s uncontrollable rampage and the ensuing chaos. Of course, there was a reason.

Yuder looked directly at Kishiar and took a deep breath.

“In the previous game, it was a principle to deal with an out-of-control Awakener as quickly as possible. To achieve this, even bending the rules and laws was somewhat tolerated. Among them, the rampage of a mental-type Awakener was considered far more dangerous than others. You can guess the reason, I assume.”

Yuder glanced once towards the darkness swarming with Nahan’s illusions, then looked away.

“Right now, this space is filled with Nahan’s power. Although the Commander has been pushing it back, we have all been momentarily affected. I believe it’s no exaggeration to say that the fiend has peeked into the minds of everyone here at least once. But among us… one person is harboring a secret unknown to him.”

Kishiar’s eyes flickered.

“…Hosanna.”

“Yes. Whether Hosanna is near death or not, the illusion ability has equally read his mind. That means…”

“The secret bound by oath would now be known to him, is what you mean to say.”

“Exactly.”

Nahan can read the illusions of fear created in others’ minds. Hosanna’s fears, who would do anything for Nahan, naturally had a great connection with him.

Hosanna knew, but until now Nahan did not - his origin, the hidden secrets.

If the Awakener, in his rampage, had learned this truth, what reaction would he show?

“Soon, a rampage many times stronger than the current one will begin. The moment the shadow barrier is even slightly breached, the illusions he creates will engulf this area. And the first target will undoubtedly be…”

“The Herne family.”

“Yes, I believe so too.”

Awakener in a rampage usually loses their senses, recklessly expending their power until self-destruction. In such a state, they hardly recognized who was in front of them.

However, mental-type Awakener, perhaps due to their strong mental power, regained some semblance of their senses over time. The more skilled they originally were, the higher the likelihood of this happening. Of course, this didn’t mean their rampage stopped. Once they reached that state, they couldn’t stop their frenzy, whether willingly or not, until they saw the end.

And naturally, a madman who had regained some sense was much harder to deal with than one who was completely out of his mind.

And now, the madman they must face was none other than Nahan.

“Currently, he seems to have not regained his senses, but the margin of safety we have will soon end. Therefore, a swift resolution is of utmost priority.”

“Do you have a plan in mind?”

“That… I’ll tell you after meeting Kurga and Gakane.”

It wasn’t long before Kurga and Gakane emerged from the shadows. Startled and exhausted from their tense vigil, they were taken aback upon seeing Yuder appear with Kishiar.

“Yuder!”

“So it was you who infiltrated here…! It’s a relief to see you unharmed.”

“Did you deal with the sage? What about the others?”

“It’s fine. There’s no need to worry about them. And Hosanna?”

“Here, but still unconscious.”

Yuder briskly cut off their questions and looked over the fallen Hosanna. Lying there, unconscious and gasping for breath, a miasma of tangled power pulsated over Hosanna’s body, like a pot about to boil over.

‘He certainly seems on the brink of a rampage. But it’s more likely he’ll die before reaching that state.’

The energy of the barely recovered Awakener was in complete disarray. If Hosanna rampaged in this condition, he would likely die from his own power before being able to use it effectively.

‘If only we had a spare suppression device, it might have served as a temporary solution…’

Yet, even that was doubtful in such a state.

Keeping Hosanna here was dangerous. Having reached that conclusion, Yuder turned away.

“Gakane, can you pinpoint Nahan’s exact location?”

“Sorry, Yuder, but with his energy so pervasive in here, it’s hard to locate him. I didn’t even properly notice you coming in…”

Gakane shook his head wearily. Yuder stared intently at his face and spoke.

“I heard that. But from what I’ve seen, you should be able to do it.”

“…What?”

“I saw how you handled the shadows earlier. With your skills improved to that extent, it doesn’t make sense that you can’t do it. It’s just that you keep thinking the power that created this space isn’t yours.”

“But…”

“The Commander’s power only slightly enhanced what’s visible to your eyes. This is your territory, and Nahan is nothing more than an ant trapped in your hand. Think like that and try again.”

“An ant? Nahan…? I suppose it fits…”

Kurga muttered, lips twitching.

“No matter how large your hand is, it’s still yours. Does it make sense not to know what you’re holding? Don’t be afraid. You can do it if you try. It won’t even be that hard.”

“…”

“You need to do this to save time. Only you can.”

Yuder’s words made Gakane’s eyes flutter. After closing his eyes tightly, then reopening them, he clenched his lips and nodded.

“Okay! I’ll try.”

“Let me know as soon as you find out.”

After responding, Yuder turned to Kishiar and Kurga.

“As soon as Gakane locates him, I’ll confront Nahan. My way of dealing with him will surely make it difficult to maintain this space. I’d like the Commander to entrust Hosanna to Kurga to send out, and then, at my signal, to collapse this space entirely. Afterward, I’d like your assistance in ensuring Nahan doesn’t approach the Herne family. That’s my plan.”

“What? But that’s too much for you to…”

“Aren’t you taking on too much burden yourself?”

Kurga’s puzzled reply was followed by Kishiar’s quiet inquiry.

“Do you have a surefire way to confront Nahan alone without harm? And how do you plan to break through the illusions that fill this space?”

“Didn’t you already see me escape them once? Besides, I have experience dealing with such individuals. You know that.”

Yuder spoke briefly, conscious of Kurga, but in his previous life, he had encountered more rampaging Awakener than anyone else and had experience subduing them. He couldn’t claim to have never suffered a scratch, but he had never sustained serious, lasting injuries either.

Even now, facing Nahan, his belief in his own victory remained unshaken.

“Consider this. There is no more efficient strategy than this one. We lack the luxury of time to devise another method.”

Kishiar himself surely knew that a significant portion of his power had been depleted. In contrast, Yuder, having only assisted Ever in dealing with the sage, still had plenty of energy left.

While Yuder might withstand a few injuries, the situation was different for Kishiar. He was the Commander who needed to oversee the entire battlefield. Though he had gained much more freedom in using his power compared to the past, his vessel was not yet in a perfect state.

Knowing that Kishiar was still paying the price for using such immense power in real-time, how could Yuder add to his burden?

To be honest, Yuder was more worried about Kishiar's vessel breaking than Nahan's threat.

"…"

Kishiar maintained his silence, his inscrutable gaze fixed on Yuder.

'Do I have to say it out loud?'

After a moment of hesitation, Yuder exhaled sharply and spoke.

"…Choosing this method is not just because I believe I can win by throwing myself into the fray. Without the Commander's complete assurance of safety, I too can do nothing. It's just that. So please, allow me this stubbornness just this once."

Finally, Kishiar lowered his gaze and a faint smile crossed his face. A whirlwind of deep-seated emotions flickered briefly in the eyes of the man looking at his hand, then settled.

"It seems I have no choice. After hearing such words, how can I not grant permission?"

"…"

"But still, I will clear the path to Nahan for you. I can manage that much, so don't refuse this offer."

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Chapter 842

“But still, I will clear the path to Nahan for you. I can manage that much, so don’t refuse this offer.”

The weight of emotion in those red eyes oppressed Yuder’s heart. Swallowing down the sensation, he nodded silently, his lips sealed shut.

“…Yes.”

“I think I’ve found Nahan’s location…!”

As Yuder struggled to break the silence as he and Kishiar gazed at each other, fortunately, Gakane’s strained voice drew everyone’s attention.

“Did you find it?”

“He’s much further than before he was trapped in this space. And it seems he’s still moving.”

Gakane’s eyelids, tightly shut in concentration, twitched incessantly.

“If he’s moving, how should I pursue him from my end?”

“I’ll send signals through the shadows.”

Opening his eyes, Gakane drew out a thin shadow from his fingertips and wrapped it around Yuder’s wrist. It clung like a bracelet made of black thread, stirring faintly, giving an odd sensation.

“As this is my space, I can send signals through it. Keep moving to the right… The shadow will react more as you get closer to Nahan, so you can follow it.”

“Got it. Thank you, Gakane.”

“No, I should thank you. I never thought it would work, but I did it, all thanks to you…”

Gakane, his eyes open, smiled tiredly but with a renewed vitality.

“I did what only I could, right? Enough to be of help to you?”

“Yes, exactly, well done.”

“Haha.”

Encouraged by his own achievement, Gakane looked proud and happy, prompting Kurga to shake his head.

“You really are like a terminal case of the Cavalry disease…”

‘Cavalry disease?’

Yuder, intrigued but restrained by the situation, didn’t inquire further. He flexed and swung his shadow-wrapped hand, testing its resilience, then turned to Kishiar.

“Let’s depart now. Is that alright with you?”

Kishiar nodded and reached out his hand. Yuder felt an invisible force envelop him and Kishiar more densely.

“Let’s go.”

“Be safe, Commander!”

“Yuder. I’ll help you from here through the shadow curtain, somehow. So, be careful and don’t get hurt…!”

Leaving behind Kurga and Gakane’s farewells, Yuder started to run. Soon, the voices of his companions faded as if cut off.

All that was left to feel was the warmth of Kishiar close by, the ominous and gloomy aura engulfing everything else, and the darkness of the black

shadow veil.

Shapeless, ghostly apparitions swirled around the running Yuder like the wind. They lunged, trying to penetrate the barrier of Kishiar's energy, but none could break through, repeatedly being repelled.

Despite repeating the same futile attempts dozens of times, the apparitions showed no signs of fatigue. The increasing number of phantoms as he ran indicated Nahan must be nearby.

-Woo… Woo-woo…

-Useless Omega Cavalry Commander…

-Kill that traitor…! Behead him and display it on the Seventh Wall Street…!

-Yudrain… Yudrain…

Amidst the chilling wails and screams, occasionally, the voices of those he had encountered in a previous life mingled in. Yet, Yuder paid them no mind, focusing solely on his wrist bound by the shadow and on Kishiar beside him.

Kishiar, too, ignored the faint apparitions clinging to him, his gaze fixed ahead. Though outwardly calm, his complexion had turned even paler than before.

Judging by the way the voices of the apparitions clinging to Kishiar only sounded like a hum, it seemed he couldn't hear the voices of the apparitions attached to Yuder. Despite having no secrets left from him, Yuder felt relieved.

Knowing something and experiencing it as reality were, after all, two different matters.

Suddenly, the shadow wrapped around his wrist writhed and trembled, pointing in a slightly different direction than before. It seemed Nahan was on the move.

“Has he moved?”

Kishiar, turning sharply, asked.

“Yes. He seems to be moving continuously. The speed… suggests he’s regaining his senses. Be careful.”

Yuder changed direction. The vibration of the shadow around his hand grew stronger, eventually allowing him to know the way without looking.

As they continued, the number of surrounding apparitions increased to the point where it became difficult to see. So many overlapped that the black shadow curtain blurred, creating a misty, whitish haze before their eyes.

The sensation of a rampaging, tremendous power constricted their breaths.

A quiet, unfathomable depth of hostility surged around them.

Every nerve in Yuder’s body tensed as he felt all the anger Nahan originally harbored, now twisted and amplified dozens of times, filling the air.

Even having experienced rampaging Awakeners countless times in a past life, Yuder couldn’t help but frown at the intensity.

‘It’s severe…’

Yuder realized that if he had come this far without Kishiar’s abilities, it would have been incredibly difficult to proceed, a thought he reluctantly acknowledged.

As Nahan’s energy intensified, the power Kishiar used to protect them grew stronger. Sweat began to form on the brow of the man who had maintained his composure until now, as his unseen force strongly repelled the apparitions.

“How much further to Nahan?”

“Very soon. He seems close.”

In this ominous darkness, a few steps were enough to lose sight of each other. Now, with Nahan’s rampant energy fiercely overwhelming them, it was even more so.

Yuder, scanning the darkness sharply, spoke up.

“From here on, I’ll handle it. Please step back, Commander.”

“…”

“Commander?”

When no response came, Yuder turned to see Kishiar, who had just pushed back an apparition that nearly broke through, exhaling a long breath, his eyebrows relaxed.

“There’s no need to rush. But… would you grant me the chance to be stubborn just this once?”

“What?”

Before Yuder could finish, golden magic surged from Kishiar’s hand.

“What… Commander!”

As Kishiar muttered something indistinct with complex hand movements, around ten magic stones - from the bracelets he wore, the brooch on his formal wear, and even the jewels embedded in his ceremonial sword’s scabbard - shattered all at once.

Simultaneously, a fully-formed golden shield enveloped Yuder like a cocoon, then turned transparent as it emitted light.

Yuder felt the oppressive sensation that had been weighing on him disappear, replaced by a feeling of liberation as his breath became easier. A faint golden light enveloped and protected his body. Though not well-versed in magic, he could distinctly sense that this was something extraordinary.

However, Kishiar’s complexion told a different story. This was the first time Yuder had seen him looking so perilous since the incident in the Cavalry’s underground, where he had used complex magic to counteract the explosion of a Red Stone during an experiment with Thais Yulman and Alik. A feeling of dizziness washed over Yuder.

“Don’t do this! There’s no need to go to such lengths…!”

“If I wasn’t certain that this would make things even slightly safer, I wouldn’t want to move from here either.”

The man, having completed his task and letting his hands fall, smiled with an indiscernible expression, lifting the corners of his lips.

“…So that’s why.”

“…”

“If you’re angry, I’ll accept your protest after all this is over.”

With those words, the magic power dispersed like dust, fading away swiftly.

Perhaps it would have been better if he had simply ordered Yuder not to get hurt and to return safely. But this was different. Even if the words sounded similar, the feelings behind them were vastly different. The sincerest, most vulnerable, and secretive emotions that the man had been suppressing throughout their journey overwhelmed Yuder, mixed with that smile.

Ah.

It was then that Yuder truly understood the meaning behind the words he had spoken earlier.

How could he not grant permission after hearing such words?

As if breaking a long silence, his lips finally parted.

“How could I…”

How could I possibly protest after hearing such words.

Only upon hearing Yuder’s faintly uttered voice did Kishiar truly smile with sincerity.

Unknowingly, Yuder felt a strong urge to reach out and gently caress Kishiar’s cheek.

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Chapter 843

Unknowingly, Yuder felt a strong urge to reach out and gently caress Kishiar's cheek.

Had they not been within Gakane's space, Yuder would have already acted on that impulse, regardless of whether there was Nahan in front of him or not.

His heart raced as if in anger, a storm of emotions raging within him, both rough and desirous of an immediate embrace and kiss. He struggled to suppress these feelings when Kishiar quietly spoke.

"Seeing such stubbornness… it's not as bad as I thought."

"…"

"So, don't worry about me."

At those words, Yuder's patience reached its end.

It mattered not whether Gakane and Nahan were aware of their plight.

Yuder closed and then opened his eyes before striding towards Kishiar with fierce steps, wrapping his hand around Kishiar's neck. On tiptoes, before the other could react, he pressed his lips against his.

The swift and rough action hurt a bit where they collided, but it was bearable. As he pushed his tongue forward, filled with boiling emotions, Kishiar's tongue responded a beat late.

A deep, brief entanglement. Then their lips parted again.

Yuder glared at the face so close yet seemingly far, as if to etch it in his memory. A sigh. The slightest touch of breath tickling his lips sent heat

coursing from head to toe, causing an involuntary tremble in his hands and feet.

It seemed Kishiar felt the same; the heat radiated from his nape could even be felt through the thin leather of his gloves.

In a world of darkness and illusions where everything was in disarray, only their shared warmth was vivid.

Yuder, steadying his breath, spoke towards those red eyes.

“Do you remember… our experience in the arena?”

“There’s nothing from our times together that I don’t remember.”

“I believe… this might help in ‘recovery’ to some extent, like back then. It’s all I can offer for now, but please bear with it.”

He muttered almost as if chewing on his words, then they finally separated. The man, a bit dazed, listened to Yuder’s words and then burst out laughing.

“I thought you did it just because you wanted to… Well, that’s a good reason too. If Gakane or anyone else asks, I’ll say that.”

“I did want to.”

Admitting gruffly, Kishiar’s laughter abruptly stopped.

For a moment, he seemed at a loss for words, unusually covering his mouth in silence, then finally he sighed deeply.

“…I hope that just now, it won’t affect your strength.”

“It doesn’t matter. If my strength is to diminish over such a thing, let it be so.”

A strength that fragile was of no use to him.

It had been a choice made of his own volition, ready to face any consequences.

Yuder spoke again, perhaps watched by unseen eyes in the darkness.

“I don’t know what kind of strength you’ve granted me, Commander, but I’ll use it well.”

“It’s a strength that protects both body and mind. Even in my absence, you’ll be able to fight as usual for a certain period.”

“I see. Understood.”

Yuder drew his sword, turning his back on Kishiar.

“I believe you’ll know the signal without me saying. I’ll see you again soon.”

Their last gaze exchanged softened gently.

Yuder, imprinting this moment in his mind, dashed in the direction of the vibrating shadows, feeling as heavy as if drenched in water the moment he left Kishiar’s protective range.

-Wooooo…!

‘Here.’

Guided by his instincts and ingrained experience, Yuder slashed through the darkness with his sword.

-Clang!

The swung blade was met with a sharp metallic sound, obstructed by something.

Following the force he had gathered, Yuder’s bright golden eyes, the Eye of Magic, pierced the darkness, revealing the hidden form within.

A blurry but distinct figure of a person appeared - a knight wielding a sword. It was a figure Yuder, or rather Yudrain, recognized.

‘…The Knight of Frost… that’s what he was called.’

The Knight of Frost, a swordmaster from a small northern kingdom, had garnered immense attention in his previous life as the first swordmaster to become an Awakener. Comparable figures were few, limited to the likes of King Ejain, the Silver King followed by six stars and Guardian of the Barrier, and Yuder himself, hailed as the world’s greatest Awakener.

Though challenging King Ejain was difficult due to his royal status, a mere knight was not so exempt.

The Orr Empire, which had formed the first Awakener organization in the form of the Cavalry, was curious to test whether this new force could threaten their renown. Naturally, this led to Yuder stepping forward.

Under the guise of a friendly exchange, Emperor Katchian invited the Knight of Frost in a demeaning manner, pressuring his country and orchestrating a duel between him and Yuder.

After a long battle, the victor was inevitably Yuder, but not without his own losses. Among the many formidable opponents he had faced, this knight ranked among the strongest, and Yuder had fought without holding back.

As a result of this duel, the knight’s country suffered considerable losses. While Yudrain’s strength became widely known, Yuder personally gained nothing. It was later revealed that Emperor Katchian’s henchmen had cunningly poisoned the knight’s close aide before the duel began, adding only to his reputation as the emperor’s cowardly dog willing to do anything.

The Knight of Frost, who had shown some respect for the Commander of the Cavalry before the duel, spat at Yuder’s feet and left.

-You’re a dog with neither honor nor pride. Who would grieve losing to a dog?

‘Yes, that’s what he said…’

Yuder had tried to contact the Knight of Frost again for an investigation related to the world’s destruction, but the knight had refused all communication. It was an expected outcome, given the circumstances. There were a few more like him after that, thus it wasn’t that special of a case.

‘Anyway… the important thing is that the Knight of Frost before me now is definitely a figment of my memory.’

But this illusion felt different from those he had encountered before.

The clash of swords felt too real, and the way the attacks were parried felt genuine. And crucially…

Yuder’s gaze slowly scanned the Knight of Frost, who had crossed swords with him, and the shadow of a man standing behind.

A man staring blankly, his limbs twisted and entangled in a surging, out-of-control aura. The altered aura and nearly unrecognizable face made identification difficult, but the burn scars on one side of his face were unmistakable.

“Nahan.”

“…”

Nahan did not respond. However, Yuder clearly felt that he was being targeted. The simultaneous sensation of immense malice and murderous intent made his hair stand on end.

Simultaneously, the figure of the Knight of Frost also violently reacted.

Through this, Yuder was able to glean some information about the situation.

‘Indeed, this must be an illusion of the most skilled enemy in my memory.’

The real top talent in Yuder's memory was undoubtedly Kishiar, but he had never seriously fought with him. So, it seemed that the next in line was this man.

The Knight of Frost was indeed one of the toughest adversaries Yuder had faced in Yudrain Aile's numerous battle records, excluding monsters.

An illusion nearly as tangible as reality.

Had it not been for the rampage, Yuder could not have even imagined the existence of such a phenomenon. It was an immense ability.

However, Yuder was not afraid. He had somewhat expected him to resort to similar tactics.

"Unable to face me directly due to lack of combat ability, so you come at me like this. Fine, think I can't handle it."

A foe he had once defeated. Could he not beat him a second time?

Yuder coolly swung his sword before engaging the oncoming Knight of Frost.

In an instant, the sound of swords clashing dozens of times echoed in the darkness. Each collision saw Yuder's blade graze the sharply splintering fragments of ice.

The transparent ice attack that could be materialized through the sword. That was the Awakener's ability that earned the Knight of Frost his epithet.

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Chapter 844

The transparent ice attack that could be materialized through the sword. That was the Awakener's ability that earned the Knight of Frost his epithet.

'It was a troublesome power.'

The swordmaster's greatest feature was the aura they could freely unleash through their sword, essentially their sword energy. Adding ice to that was a formidable combination.

If you dodged the sword energy from the right, razor-sharp ice shards, as if waiting on the left, would reveal themselves and strike. If you countered with your sword, the ice would freeze upon contact, sending a significant shock through the opposing weapon.

The shock was so intense that ordinary weapons could hardly withstand a duel with the Knight of Frost. Indeed, in a past life, Yuder had lost a sword and several knives, among other weapons, to the Knight. The frozen and shattered weapons were beyond repair.

However, that was then. Now, Yuder possessed a sword far superior and made of sturdier, more precious materials than any he had used before.

Unconcerned about his weapon shattering, Yuder deftly blocked every attack. He countered the ice flying towards him with the power of the wind, and as he pressed on, the illusion began to waver.

If it had been a real human, Yuder might have seen a hint of panic in their demeanor. He let out a cold laugh.

'Back then, rather than using one particularly good weapon, I thought it would be more efficient to use whatever weapon was available at the time or to steal other people's weapons…'

This approach was not bad, especially when facing multiple foes, but it proved cumbersome against an opponent like this. Now, free from such burdens, Yuder felt an exhilarating ease in combat.

Boom, clang, clang! Boom!

Though initially caught off guard by the unpredictable attack patterns, Yuder gradually began to overpower the Knight of Frost.

He might have been slightly less powerful, but it was fine. His accumulated experience and memories of previous encounters were enough to compensate. And then, in a moment, Yuder infused his sword with flames, simultaneously blocking the Knight of Frost's sword energy and ice storm, and charged through an opening.

Whoosh…!

A misty fog, like an illusion, obscured his vision, and the Knight of Frost vanished.

'What?'

Yuder reflexively shielded himself with his arms and the wind, furrowing his brow and looking up again, only to see another figure where the Knight of Frost had stood.

-So you are the Emperor's dog… The Pearl Tower may have fallen, but my magic power remains intact. Do you think even an emperor can dare stop me from going where I wish? The one who will see their last day today will not be me!

'…I know him from my past life.'

In an era when usable magic was scarce due to the gradual depletion of magic power, he was one of the few mages known for wielding dangerous magic with ease. During the time of the Pearl Tower, he had mostly secluded himself, practicing offensive magic. After the tower's fall and his

awakening, he made a name for himself on the continent by displaying skills that were several times greater than before.

The fact that he was both a mage and an Awakener was not widely known. His ability was a mental one that maximized the effects of the magic he used, and as it was only applicable to himself, keeping it a secret was not particularly challenging.

People referred to him as the ‘Mage of the Crimson Path’. It meant he possessed such extraordinary skill that, if he wished, he could walk a path covered with blood.

After the fall of the Pearl Tower, Emperor Katchian desired to appoint the Mage of the Crimson Path as a lifelong court mage. However, the mage declined for several reasons, including a lack of trust and willingness to follow Emperor Katchian.

When news arrived that the mage had accepted an invitation from King Ejain, Emperor Katchian ordered Yuder to assassinate the Mage of the Crimson Path before he could leave the empire.

The Mage of the Crimson Path, who looked exactly the same as before, was wearing a red and black mage’s robe befitting his name and cast a spell towards Yuder. His body, hands, feet, and every conceivable space for accessories were densely filled with ornaments that all shone brightly.

A multitude of spells, each drawing power from the magic stones, were cast simultaneously. Surrounding and swiftly striking the target, these quick and precise offensive spells were the Mage of the Crimson Path’s specialty.

But…

‘You weren’t the only one who was able to use multiple attributes quickly.’

With his eyes wide open, Yuder swung his arms towards the spells rushing at him.

Instantly, the forces unleashed from his fingertips mingled appropriately, striking and exploding each spell cast by the mage. The aftermath, almost too fantastic to be an illusion, tore his ceremonial clothes and left scratches oozing blood on his skin. Yet Yuder paid little heed to such wounds.

He leaped into the air, stepping on the wind, heading in unpredictable directions, and threw the knives he had drawn from within his cloak at the mage. They were the same knives, previously a promotion gift for Sunz and Emon, that had proved useful before.

-…!!

In the blink of an eye, the illusory mage lost limbs one by one to the dagger, letting out a mournful scream.

-Poor beast on a leash. I can see the dreadful results of your murderous deeds piled upon your shoulders. You are cursed… The empire, the Emperor, will never achieve what they desire by doing such things…!

Those eyes filled with hatred were identical to those Yudrein Aile saw when he took the mage's life in his previous existence.

"…"

Whoosh, once again, the mist in front of him dispersed, revealing a new opponent.

Each one of them was an acquaintance from a previous life. Yuder, with an expressionless face, took the best approach, methodically dispatching those he had previously confronted.

After cutting down about ten, he thought it was fine since most were not from this life. But at the eleventh, someone he knew from this life appeared.

-Ugh, aaahhh…

A large man, dressed in bloodied cavalry armor, with grotesquely twisted wings and antlers broken and covered in wounds.

He was none other than Elpkins from a previous life.

The clear tear streaks across his distorted, sightless face were physiological tears of pain, reflexively shed by a body on the verge of bursting. Many rampaging Awakeners ended their frenzied state like this, shedding tears with a blank expression, facing a terribly painful end.

-Commander, Commander… kill… kill…!

-Save me… please save me…

-Die… I'll kill them all…!

Indeed, even Yuder couldn't help but pause for a moment. The overlapping images of Elpkins from this life, and the now frenzied and facing his last moments, caused this hesitation.

"…"

And in that moment of hesitation, Yuder failed to perfectly evade an attack from Elpkins, who struck in the blink of an eye, by the narrowest of margins.

Even a slight brush from the frenzied Awakener's tremendous strength sent his body flying like a small stone.

'Damn it.'

Yuder cursed his own foolishness for even a momentary lapse in concentration and reflexively used his power to brace for the impact. However, when he crashed to the ground, surprisingly, he bounced back with a squelching sensation, suffering less damage than he anticipated.

Of course, his shoulder, directly grazed, was torn, but the lack of further impact meant his injuries were minimal.

'Could it be… Gakane helped me?'

Yuder recalled Gakane's voice, promising to help him somehow using the shadow curtain as he departed. He had thought it nearly impossible for Gakane to grasp his situation, given the vast amount of power he had used, but astonishingly, it seemed Gakane had indeed done something with the shadow curtain.

It was absurd, but it cleared his mind.

He had been somewhat dulled in his judgement, continuously facing illusions despite being under the magic spell protection from Kishiar.

"…Gakane, thank you."

Yuder softly expressed his gratitude to his friend, who might be listening somewhere, and then firmly regripped his sword.

He faced the illusionary Elpkins, who was rushing towards him with tears of blood and screams, sword raised in readiness.

"I warned you not to seek power through such dangerous means, but you didn't heed it back then."

But this time would be different. It already was.

Just as Gakane, who should have died, had survived to assist Yuder, and just as the knives of Sunz and Emon, which should have been used to defeat him in the past, were now in his hands, so too would Elpkins change.

Yuder, without hesitation, thrust his sword toward the exposed center of the charging opponent.

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Chapter 845

Yuder, without hesitation, thrust his sword toward the exposed center of the charging opponent.

As the tip of the sword buried itself, the expected sensation of piercing flesh and bone was absent. The illusion of the explosively powerful Elpkins ceased silently, blurring like mist before scattering aimlessly and vanishing, much like it had always done.

Then, all was silent.

“Huff, huff…”

Yuder, catching his breath and focusing his eyes, sought Nahan, who had once again concealed his presence amidst the illusion. Invisible to the eye, yet Yuder could distinctly feel his proximity.

‘If he’s managed to fabricate such an illusion, he’s surely surpassed his limits long ago.’

Truly, a tenacious adversary. Among the numerous foes he had faced, this was one aspect Yuder had to acknowledge.

A faint disturbance suddenly caught Yuder’s sharp attention near him.

-Clang!

Reacting reflexively with agile swiftness, Yuder, who swung his sword, furrowed his brows upon seeing the new figure, who seemed poised to block his attack.

‘Again?’

However, this newly emerged enemy was distinctly different from those before.

Emerging from the shadows, gradually taking on color, was Kishiar, dressed in a formal suit with white gloves. The golden-haired man's outline flickered, blurring and almost disintegrating repeatedly. Yuder's irritation surged, involuntarily tightening his grip on his sword.

"Even in my distracted state, do you think I'd fall for the same illusion twice in one day?"

"At least it didn't get sliced immediately upon appearance like the others just now. That's sufficient for now."

These words, not expecting a response, were unexpectedly met by Kishiar's voice. However, it wasn't Kishiar's typical soft, deep tone, but a voice rough and reeking of blood.

Yuder, eyes narrowing coldly, addressed the owner of the voice. "Do you still have enough sanity left to pull off such tricks, Nahan?"

Then Kishiar, or rather, Nahan, smiled slightly with his lips.

Undoubtedly Kishiar's face, yet the expression was unmistakably different.

"It's not about what's left… I've gained the power to break free from the cumbersome limits of the flesh."

"What are you saying?"

"I've managed to overlay my existence with an illusion, enabling me to stand before you like this. Do you understand?"

"…"

Nahan, able to move somewhat normally through the illusion, couldn't change the fact that his physical body was rapidly deteriorating due to the rampage. Yet, he seemed unconcerned.

'It's not that he doesn't care. It's more like he's lost his mind to the extent that he doesn't think about it anymore.'

Watching Kishiar’s facade calmly utter such words, it became glaringly clear that Nahan was deeply deranged. Whether that was an advantage or not was another matter.

Yuder exhaled deeply, looking ahead.

“I may not fully grasp your current state, Nahan, but you are in a rampage. The power you think you wield is nothing but ashes obtained by burning your life force, and soon, even that will vanish.”

“A rampage? Is that what you call this state?”

Nahan asked, tilting his head with a laugh.

“Yes.”

“Aha… I see. So that’s why I feel such overflowing power. Well, it’s not bad. It’s been a long time since I’ve felt this free.”

“To die agonizingly in an explosion or at the hands of another, that’s the only path left for you.”

“I am perfectly fine now, without any pain. If you hadn’t obstructed me, I would have already stepped outside and dealt the deserved punishment to those I’ve finally found - the true targets of my vengeance.”

True targets of vengeance, indeed. Nahan must have already accessed Hosanna’s memories.

Despite this realization, Yuder casually diverted the conversation.

“True targets of vengeance, you say… The sage has already been captured by us, so give it up.”

“Haha. No, that old and arrogant liar doesn’t matter to me anymore. What I seek is far more significant, more despicable, and more deserving of death - those worms of the south who have trampled upon countless lives, creating original sin…”

As Nahan’s hate-filled speech lengthened and the illusion began to crumble, Yuder swiftly swung his sword, slicing through the illusion’s chest like lightning.

He thought it was a perfect strike, but the illusion simply split into two and vanished, only to reappear suddenly behind Yuder. Nahan, still wearing Kishiar’s smiling face, laughed.

“Oh… To still have such energy after all that fighting. You’re truly remarkable. I admire that ability.”

“…”

“Cutting down your opponent without a moment’s hesitation, even when they just spoke to you. What would you have done if it was real?”

Instead of responding, Yuder once again used his power. The illusion, consumed by fierce flames, vanished and then reappeared from another direction.

“Now that I think about it, it’s always been strange. The thing you feared the most was the Cavalry Commander. Yet, despite that, you were too close to him. Even to the point of having forbidden relationships. What exactly is your relationship? I’ve seen many fears throughout the years, but yours is the first of its kind. It’s incomprehensible.”

The illusion was dispersed by a fierce wind.

“But when I looked into the fears of the Cavalry Commander, guess what? You appeared there! Did you know?”

A sharp, ice-like stream of water pierced straight through the chattering illusion’s face.

“You’re not surprised. Really strange. But the strangest part was just now. Do you know what I’m about to say?”

After saying this, Nahan, despite being scattered and vanishing countless times by Yuder’s relentless power, continued to resurrect like a ghost,

echoing his voice from everywhere.

-Most of your most difficult-to-face enemies were Awakeners.

-Those with incredible skills unseen and unheard by anyone.

-They all called you the Cavalry Commander.

-Taking for granted names that don’t exist in the present.

-Spewing stories about unfamiliar political situations.

-Beings who existed, yet did not.

-Who exactly were they?

-And who are you, who faced them?

-What is the identity of this Cavalry Commander they fear?

“…Damn you.”

Indeed, all this time, Nahan had been conjuring Yuder’s past enemies as illusions, gathering information about him. Due to his excessive intelligence, Nahan had aptly picked up information, and with each word he uttered, Yuder couldn’t help but feel unsettled.

Even if he didn’t want to be disturbed, his heart involuntarily wavered. Each time that happened, his wavering fed into Nahan’s illusion, giving it strength. The illusion of Kishiar grew clearer, and their voices began to mix.

-Is the secret to the tremendous power and knowledge that you possess hidden in this mystery? Am I right? What do you think?

-What do you think? What’s the answer?

The voice shifted from Nahan’s to Kishiar’s, and then back to Nahan’s again.

The illusion, becoming increasingly gigantic and vivid, swelled up, pressing down on Yuder. He sensed that this moment was Nahan's gambit, the instant he had been waiting to strike at him.

But Yuder hadn't been waiting all this time just to be passively defeated.

The most vulnerable moment for a person is when they abandon defense and launch into an attack.

Therefore, this was precisely the moment when Nahan, and the grotesquely widened range of his illusion due to his rampage, would be at their weakest.

"Shut up!"

Yuder clenched his fist and slammed it towards the ground, unleashing his power. Simultaneously, a massive force of the earth stirred, violently shaking the area around him.

The shadowy curtain that constituted this space began to tremble in response, but Yuder trusted in Kishiar and Gakane.

'Not yet. Just a little more…!'

Before Nahan's illusion could shake Yuder's mind any further, and before the magic power that Kishiar had bestowed ran out, Yuder had to break the illusion and find Nahan's true body first.

Yuder continued to exert his power. The ground, which had absorbed endless amounts of enormous power, shook as if it were about to collapse. He unleashed an attack that left no place for Nahan to hide, regardless of where he was concealed.

How long had he done this? Finally, the incessantly babbling illusion of Kishiar shattered into disarray.

-Ugh, ugh…!

Indeed, if he couldn't directly find him, shaking the entirety was the way. Though Yuder had also exhausted a tremendous amount of power in the

process, the disappearance of the irritating illusion was a significant relief.

‘Where is he?’

Based on the moment the illusion shattered, Yuder turned his head, making a guess.

In the bloodshot gaze, a corner within the darkness came into view.

“There you are.”

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Chapter 846

“There you are.”

Yuder immediately ceased exerting his power and, stepping on the wind, dashed towards the shadowy figure lurking in the darkness.

A massive fire illuminated the darkness, revealing beneath it the bloodied body of Nahan, hunched in the shadows. His body, swollen and bulging as if about to burst, was hidden behind an illusion, tears streaming from his eyes.

In that brief moment when their eyes met…

“–-!!!”

As Yuder unleashed his sword and powers toward Nahan, a cacophony of indistinguishable, enormous sounds overlapped in hundreds and thousands, assaulting his ears and mind.

Illusions, incomprehensible and targeting only Yuder, poured down like a colossal tidal wave.

All senses - sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch - surpassed the limits of his mind’s comprehension. A terrifying sensation, as if his brain were screaming, engulfed him.

‘This is…’

Yuder instinctively realized this was the final move Nahan had never used against other Awakeners, but had efficiently employed in killing the non-Awakeners. In the past, an Awakener of Yuder’s level would not have been affected this much, but now, with his amplified power, it was different.

The brief blink of an eye stretched into days, years, an eternity.

- YudrainYudrainYudrainYudrainYudrainYudrainYudrainYudrain…!
- YuderYuderYuderYuderYuderYuderYuderYuderYuder…!
- The sinner, hear! You forget your duties and responsibilities. When the truth is revealed, you shamelessly accept your deserved punishment.
-
- Execution…
- If only it were all a joke…
- Ahahahahah.

Though he knew these were not real, his body refused to move. Suddenly, his vision whirled, and blood burst from his eyes, nose, and mouth. His knees buckled.

His entire body felt as if it were being scorched with a branding iron. His breath was stifled as if submerged in a water prison. His leg bones felt as though they were being extracted. Nails, hammered into his pierced stomach, twisted painfully, preventing healing. It was as if his neck was being severed by a blade.

All the pains he had ever experienced overlapped, reaching their limits.

At that moment, amidst the pain filled with agonizing noise, Yuder suddenly found a familiar silence.

Drinking monster blood wine, sitting alone in the dusty, Cavalry Commander’s old office.

Watching the damp, dirty walls of the prison, feeling the torture on his body as if it were happening to someone else.

Every time he witnessed such scenes, he delved into his deepest self, strangely observing the empty and quiet things within him, counting the passing time.

The place was desolate, barren, and always silent. Where something once filled, now nothing grew ever again.

But it was his only sanctuary.

He didn’t know then, but he suspects now. Those empty holes inside Yuder Aile. At the core of that place, where nothing else could intrude, there must have been something related to Kishiar.

Kishiar.

As he faintly recalled that name, a tickling sensation stirred inside his chest. Golden light flickered momentarily in his pitch-dark vision, then faded.

‘Kishiar.’

Longing for it, he called out louder in his mind, and again, golden light was born. Gazing at the light that blossomed like a mirage and warmly enveloped him, Yuder felt the pain and cold gradually recede.

Just like that time when he was held in someone’s embrace without a single gap, and they looked at the blazing stove together.

It felt as if only he and Yuder were the sole existences left in the world, on that particular day.

Yuder stretched out his unmoving hand, trying to grasp the light. And once more, he called out a name.

The moment he had lain prostrate before the guillotine, briefly looking up at the sky, recalling the last name as petals beautifully fluttered around him.

“…”

His ears, clogged and overwhelmed with blood, failed to hear the name he uttered.

But that alone was enough.

-…!

Responding to Yuder’s call, the brilliant golden light, now a complete flame, began to push away everything that oppressed Yuder. Curses, pain,

and even the black emotions that spread like stains, dared not approach the power and were repelled, liberating Yuder.

He could finally breathe properly. Sensation returned to his hands and feet. His ears gradually cleared, and lastly, his vision.

Only then did Yuder fully perceive the golden protective magic of Kishiar that enveloped him. He had thought it vanished with time, but it hadn't. The magic shone beautifully, difficult to look away from, like immense wings wrapped around Yuder.

"Haah… Haha… Ha."

As he stared blankly at the protective magic, a faint, cough-like laughter reached his ears. Lowering his gaze, he saw Nahan, his chest impaled by his sword. Nahan was completely immobilized, bound by the powers of earth and water, unable to move an inch.

The force Yuder had unleashed while swinging his sword at the moment Nahan cast the illusion had done its job precisely, even amidst the chaos.

What had felt like an eternity was, in fact, not so. Yuder only fully realized this now.

Yuder took a deep breath and, with the remaining strength, released it into the air. A yellow flame flowed like a ribbon, cutting through the darkness, rising higher and higher.

That was the 'signal'.

'Once found… the curtain will finally lift.'

All that remained was to wait until then. Lacking the strength to change his position, Yuder decided to simply wait, half-mounted atop Nahan.

"…Let me go."

Nahan murmured, barely moving his lips. The illusion power around him still faintly ebbed and flowed but was incomparably weaker than before.

Yet, Nahan continued to mutter, trying to convey his intent. Though few words were clearly audible, the surrounding illusions amplified his meaning.

“I finally know who I must take revenge on… I can’t be defeated like this.”

“…”

“All the things I intended to do, were they really such grave sins?”

“What were you intending to do?”

As Yuder spoke, something pooled in his mouth slid out. The liquid, not clear but sticky and dark red, trickled down his chin.

A complete mess, but still, Yuder did not release the hilt of the sword impaling Nahan’s chest.

“Taking revenge… cleaning up all the trash, and then moving on to a new world…”

Yuder suddenly recalled a part of the conversation he had with Nahan in the caves of the East. Nahan’s words seemed unchanged from then to now.

But was that really so?

“A new world, huh? Who exactly is in that world?”

“…”

“Tell me. What is that world, and who will you go with?”

Engaging in conversation with a rampaging Awakener, whose rationality was hardly intact, seemed like a fool’s errand. Yet, witnessing this figure, still so fixated on revenge even in such a state, Yuder found it impossible to remain silent.

A new world solely for the Awakeners. The concept sounded appealing. But who, indeed, could actually join Nahan in this world he spoke of?

Nahan’s followers were gone, and more than half of them had been abandoned by Nahan himself. Even Hosanna, the last one remaining, was now caught in his own rampage, facing imminent death. Did Nahan even fully grasp this reality?

“Do you remember the non-Awakeners you tried to kill in the West?”

Yuder asked quietly. Nahan did not respond.

“Are you aware that many of them later became Awakeners?”

Of course, he wouldn’t know.

Yuder’s thoughts drifted to Marty, who had struggled to accept her newfound status as an Awakener. Like her, many who had narrowly escaped death found it hard to endure their own awakening.

Those who feared and loathed their own power and desperately needed a suppression device. The man before him refused to consider that anyone could become an Awakener.

The divide between the Awakeners and the non-Awakeners was vast, yet also incredibly close.

“I once thought… that some of what you said before might have been right.”

The words of Nahan from before had seemed to have their own reasoning and conviction.

Perhaps, if someone championing such beliefs had dedicated themselves to aiding the wounded and struggling Awakeners that were beyond the reach of the Cavalry, they might have formed a decent, implicit alliance.

But Nahan had succumbed to revenge, forsaking everything.

The ‘new world’ he now muttered about was no different from the ramblings of a brainwashed individual.

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Chapter 847

The ‘new world’ he now muttered about was no different from the ramblings of a brainwashed individual.

The Star of Nagran seemed unlikely to change much from his previous life, a prediction that proved accurate, yet it still left a bitter taste. Of course, this wasn’t out of sympathy for Nahan, who found himself in this situation.

“But not now, of course.”

“…Haha…”

Close to death, Nahan laughed once more.

The faint shadows of illusions swirling around him amplified his laughter, echoing like in a cave. Yuder heard in these echoes the message Nahan was trying to convey.

-It’s a pity. Since the first time I saw you, brother, I thought we were quite compatible in essence…

“Who’s your brother? Shut up.”

-If only you, brother had been on my side when we first met… Perhaps things would have been different.

Was this truly Nahan’s innermost thought, or just meaningless babble from an illusion seen by him, half-exhausted, while Nahan was already dead? Though somewhat doubtful, Yuder murmured, his lips dry.

“I said it back then, but that won’t happen.”

-

Back then, Nahan had no qualms about killing non-Awakeners. Yuder vividly remembered the face that looked down on him with amusement, issuing pathetic orders to join him.

And Yuder always had only one response to such words.

“There’s only one person who can give me orders.”

Then, the overlapping laughter of the illusions, buzzing around, suddenly stopped.

-I really don’t understand.

-It’s strange.

-Are you satisfied with where you are now? Really?

-Even after all you’ve been through?

Yuder didn’t respond. But the illusion kept murmuring.

-The illusion born from your mind never lies. It’s about things that haven’t happened yet, but you’ve experienced.

-Then, you must know things I don’t, no, things unknown to anyone in this world. It means you’re someone who knows the future.

“…”

-I’ve heard of such a being before… Yes, when I was a child.

-The wolf that bit death to death and returned… The prophet leading the stars.

‘…A wolf?’

Yuder blinked, his eyes hazy at the familiar word. When had he heard it? But before he could recall, the illusion started murmuring again, burying the thought.

-Brother, prophet. The answers you showed for the future were all horrific.

-Damned world. A world that has not improved at all, a world full of death.

-A world deserving destruction…

-So, I guess that's the true path this world would take.

-But why didn't you destroy it, knowing the answer? Why leave them be, not seeking vengeance?

-Do you believe in something like a divine will, something better than the future you know?

His ears were ringing. His head felt like it was about to split. He couldn't tell anymore if this was a conversation with Nahan or just his own internal questioning. Yuder, barely holding on, bit his lip and spoke.

"…What do I know about God? All this revenge, revenge… I don't need any of that."

-Then?

-What do you need?

The illusion asked, and Yuder remained silent for a long time. In the distance, a vast, dark curtain was slowly being peeled away, revealing a faint light filtering through.

It meant that Kishiar and Gakane had correctly received the signal.

Then, they would soon be here, receiving that light, crossing through the darkness.

Though it hadn't happened yet, just imagining their return to him brought a sense of relief and calm to his mind.

To protect a world he knew was doomed might sound grand, but in truth, the reason was simple.

It was just because… there was a comrade who, trusting in the faint signal sent by Yuder, braved all dangers and hastened to his side.

Because he hoped they could continue to live that way.

Because there was someone who believed in his words, his truth, without any proof, someone who might be crazy or a liar.

Because he hoped that person would continue to walk with him.

Yuder, still wrapped in the gradually fading magic, said,

“The one who… believes in me, in my words.”

If such a person existed, then revenge or whatever else was not his concern.

That all-too-fragile belief was enough to assure him that this damned world might yet have another chance. It made him believe he could make it happen.

And indeed, the world had changed a lot compared to before.

Kishiar La Orr was alive and walking with him.

Wasn’t that enough?

-Is that all?

“Yes.”

-I can’t understand. It’s strange and weak hypocrisy.

“Who was it that lost to that strange and weak hypocrisy?”

-…

As Nahan’s surroundings, haunted by illusions, began to fade even more, the illusion murmured softly from behind the peeling curtain.

-…You said I was supposed to explode and die, yet why is death so long and persistent for me? Is death turning its back on me too?

Yuder knew the answer.

“I said to die agonizingly in an explosion or at the hands of another. Be glad you can just fade away and leave a corpse, because if you exploded, this entire area would be in chaos. This is the best outcome.”

A rampage is when uncontrolled power surges uncontrollably. When the physical body reaches its limit, it bursts, and the power, with nowhere to go, explodes like a bomb, sweeping the surrounding area with tremendous damage before finally fading.

To handle it with minimal damage, the power of the rampaging Awakener must be drained as much as possible and lured to an uninhabited place for elimination.

Nahan’s rampage was fortunately contained by Kishiar’s timely intervention and Gakane’s barrier, separating it from the outside world, and was greatly depleted in a confrontation with Yuder, an immensely powerful Awakener.

And finally, the pierced heart.

The sword did not strike the heart directly but a little lower, closer to the solar plexus, precisely cutting the flow of energy from the source of the Awakener’s power.

It wasn’t the initial intention, but the timing was perfect. Despite the immense rampage, it seemed he would somehow avoid exploding.

‘It’s a fortunate thing…If he had exploded, I would have been the first to bear the brunt of it.’

Had that happened, the damage would have been several times greater. Although Yuder was confident of not losing to Nahan, avoiding the aftermath of an explosion was a different matter.

Yuder recalled cases of rampaging Awakeners who had failed to be properly subdued in his previous life, leaving tremendous aftermaths in their explosions. Had Kishiar known about those cases, he might not have retreated just on the word.

Anyway, despite having dealt with rampaging Awakeners for a long time, there had been few instances of subduing one as powerful as this perfectly. In that sense, Nahan was quite lucky.

He wouldn't think of it as luck, though…

Nahan's grey eyes, stained with bloody tears, looked at Yuder. The focus wasn't quite right, but Yuder met his gaze squarely.

He hadn't noticed before, but now he saw that those eyes were the same color as Myra's, and also Duke Herne's.

A strange feeling crept up on him.

As Yuder frowned, Nahan faintly moved his lips to speak.

"…Those black eyes. They resemble my brother."

"If you call me that again…"

Yuder growled like a wild beast, blood dripping down his chin, when suddenly a hand reached out from behind him and grasped his body.

Labored breathing, a distinct cool scent.

"…Yuder."

It was Kishiar. He had finally returned and supported Yuder in his arms.

Unable to think of anything else, Yuder relaxed the grip on his sword hilt he had barely managed to maintain. His body swayed and fell, and shouts from unknown people around him rang out.

"Yuder!"

“Ah…!”

Unbeknownst to him, most of the shadow curtain had already been withdrawn.

Voices of people filled the space where silence had been, along with a coldness he hadn’t felt in a while, and something large hitting his hair…

‘…Sleet? Hail?’

Something was amiss. Sensing danger, his fading consciousness snapped back into focus.

Now was not the time to pass out comfortably.

Yuder struggled to turn his head to look at Kishiar.

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Chapter 848

Yuder struggled to turn his head to look at Kishiar.

“Commander… what has… happened outside?”

Kishiar’s protective magic had briefly cleared his vision, but it soon blurred red again. Despite the lifting of the curtain, the outside situation remained obscured. A foreboding wind whirled, something clattered to the ground, and a tumultuous noise was evident, but that was all he could discern.

Had it not been for his inherently sensitive senses, surpassing those of others, even this much would have been difficult to grasp.

“Commander…?”

No response came from Kishiar. Yuder called out again, and then a deep sigh sounded from above. After a moment of silence, Yuder finally heard the awaited response from the man.

“…A similar anomaly to the one that appeared over the southern branch of the Cavalry. It seems to have emerged here now.”

“What did you say?”

Yuder, momentarily lying limp in Kishiar’s embrace, reflexively tried to sit up. Had Kishiar not pressed him down into his arms again, he would have succeeded.

“You mustn’t move. You’ve lost too much blood.”

Kishiar spoke in a dispassionately calm voice as he lifted Yuder into his arms. Standing up, the man shouted orders to those around him.

“This man here, Nahan, cannot move anymore. Protecting the surrounding area until he is completely dead is the priority. Take Gakane and Kurga to

where the priests are. Are the Cavalry guarding those cracks? Nathan too? …Understood. I will head there shortly. And the assistant…”

‘Cracks’, plural.

More than one? Yuder gasped for air, clutching at Kishiar’s clothes.

“What… Commander, how many cracks have appeared? Please, tell me the situation.”

“…”

“Commander.”

“…”

Amidst the chaos of running footsteps, the wind battering his body, and the unsettling downpour of sleet or hail, only the warmth of the one embrace shielding him remained distinct. A faint scream melded with the rest. From above, a low voice finally spoke.

“…You’ve already done more than enough. The natural choice would be to leave here for immediate treatment and rest. But even if I suggest you leave without worrying about what’s behind, you won’t comply easily, will you?”

“It’s just a bit of blood, not as bad as it looks. I can talk without issue, and my limbs are fine. With a bit of rest, I could stand and walk.”

“Nobody would believe that, seeing you bleed like this.”

“The blood can just be wiped away.”

“Can you even see what’s right in front of you?”

His attempt to assert his well-being halted suddenly. It was the deep-set gaze, and the overwhelming pain conveyed through it, that silenced him.

Even through the blurred vision, he felt he could clearly discern the color of that gaze. It was the same look Kishiar had when he told Yuder not to

apologize for wanting to do his part, the same one from when he had said he'd endure the pain himself.

"That is…"

Yuder's voice faltered, but still, he did not release his grip on Kishiar's clothes as he spoke again.

"I'm not suggesting I exert more strength right now. But I cannot leave in such a situation. I have the most knowledge about these strange cracks. It would be absurd for me to leave now. So just tell me the situation. That will be enough."

"…"

A deeper sigh than before cascaded down upon him. Yuder felt arms, painfully tight, embrace him. Yet, the moment Yuder tensed, the grip relaxed.

"It's been a while since I've felt so powerless."

"Why would you say that, Commander? Please don't talk like that."

"Because it's true."

After saying this, the man laughed. It was a faint and blurry laugh, but it lingered.

As if that was the only way he knew how to express his sorrow.

Shielding Yuder from the hail and wind pouring down on them, the man stopped his long, trembling laughter, then stood up straight, still holding him.

"I'd like to knock you out and send you away, but as you said, it's not feasible for either of us to leave under the current circumstances. So, let's do what we can for now and assess the situation. Will that satisfy you?"

"…Thank you."

Relief mixed into Yuder’s voice, prompting Kishiar to laugh once more.

“That’s much better to hear than an apology. So, you really are in a bearable condition.”

“Didn’t I tell you? It’s just a bit of blood.”

Of course, most of his strength was drained. The power of Nahan still made his head reel. Yet, based on his experience, this was not a serious injury.

‘If my power was needed urgently, that would be a problem.’

“Wait here, - hey! Are there any priests here who can use divine power?”

Kishiar asked a passerby. The blurred figures of the members recognized Yuder and gasped before responding with a strict tone.

“We do have some, but the current situation is…”

In summary, most priests with usable divine power had evacuated outside, and a few who remained were tied up with Duke Herne’s side.

“They won’t come even if we call them. Understood.”

Kishiar took off his ceremonial overcoat to cover Yuder and then carried him on his back.

“Stay still. I’ll have to use divine power as discreetly as possible.”

“…What? But if there’s a problem with your vessel, Commander…”

“To balance it, I need to use it evenly anyway.”

Kishiar curtly replied, adjusting Yuder on his back and swiftly covering his head with the overcoat. Soon, Yuder felt a warm current flowing from the hands supporting him.

The power that spread slowly from his legs was not at all painful, meticulously caressing Yuder’s body. It was a sensation akin to when

Kishiar’s protective magic had been activated.

Various stiff organs in his body gradually gained new warmth. Areas that were throbbing or numb slowly eased, regaining peace. Inside his eyes, an indescribable tickling sensation turned warm and relaxed.

Enveloped in the overcoat, Kishiar’s scent was strong, and Yuder, with his face buried in the back he was carried on, exhaled deeply.

“…”

“Are you alright?”

As the flow of power ceased, Kishiar quietly inquired. Yuder slowly poked his head out from under Kishiar’s overcoat that had been draped over him.

The hail and wind, completely blocked before, now roughly ruffled his hair. The first thing he saw beyond the back he was lying on was the nape of Kishiar’s neck, damp with sweat, and his golden hair.

His vision had almost fully returned. Sounds were clearer, and he could distinctly make out the surroundings.

The sky was almost as dark as night. A storm-like wind blew, and hail poured down fiercely. He could see several people rushing around, but the darkness was so dense that it was hard to recognize anyone.

And just as Kishiar had said, dark cracks were floating in the sky.

There were precisely three cracks, none of which had yet released anything.

“…Yes. I can see everything clearly now. You can put me down.”

“I’d rather not.”

“What?”

“It’s not time yet.”

The man briefly responded and continued walking towards a destination.

“It seems there are more people around than before the shadow curtain was deployed. I can’t figure out why.”

“We’ll have to find out now. There might be something else happening outside.”

Kishiar quickened his pace in response. Soon, someone approached them.

“Commander…. Oh.”

The person who took a deep breath was Kanna.

“Yuder!”

“Kanna. Start with the situation report.”

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Chapter 849

“Kanna. Start with the situation report.”

“Ah, yes… Understood!”

Although Kanna could not tear her eyes away from Yuder, who had a shocked expression, she reflexively straightened up and began to report.

“After Yuder disappeared into the widely spread dark shadow, the weather started to worsen dramatically! We couldn’t find a way to enter and were guarding the perimeter…”

The scattered personnel who had gone to search for the escaped Hosanna and those who remained within the Cavalry branch started to gather upon receiving the signal. Among them was Nathan Zuckerman, who was a reliable presence.

Kanna and Ever, with Nathan’s help, strategically positioned their forces while guarding the outside of the immense shadow curtain.

After feeling a tremendous shockwave from that place initially, nothing similar occurred again. However, uncertainty lingered. The Cavalry members were always on guard, ready to assist those inside who might be confronting Nahan.

But it was not an easy task. The weather worsened, turning from sleet to hail. Attempts at repairs were futile as the roads turned to mud, and roofs began collapsing and wagons suffered damage here and there.

First Princess Myra and her followers maintained their composure and tried to manage the situation, insisting on holding their ground. In contrast, the Duke’s side, seemingly besieged, was merely enduring in their forcibly halted carriages.

“It seems the Duke of Herne prioritized his safety in the midst of the chaos. And the safest place to seek refuge was…”

“Obviously, our Cavalry seemed the most approachable.”

“Yes.”

Now, with the severe hailstorm, it was impossible to leave.

The Duke of Herne, citing the danger of the Awakeners who had disrupted the funeral earlier and the potential threat of their return, left his damaged carriage and returned to the temple. Frankly, it might have been to avoid his suddenly changed daughter Myra.

That place was right next to where the Cavalry was busy discussing strategies, arguably the safest place in the south.

‘So that’s why it became more crowded.’

“Are the First Princess and other regular visitors still outside then?”

“No. After the Duke came here, we moved the First Princess and others to a nearby building for safety. As you can see, the hail is too intense… it could draw blood.”

“When did these cracks appear?”

“It was right before the large shadow curtain where the Commander was standing in disappeared. There were consecutive huge shocks that startled everyone, and then immediately after that…”

Kanna looked up at the dark cracks with a grave expression.

“And then, as the shadow curtain lifted, they kept growing larger. Now that it has completely lifted, they are no longer growing but maintaining that size.”

“Understood. Then, for now, you go straight to where Nahan is…”

“Duke Peletta! No, Cavalry Commander!”

Before Kishiar could finish his sentence, someone breathless rushed through the hail. It was Myra. Upon spotting them, she, like Kanna before her, choked back a gasp of shock at the sight of the disheveled Kishiar and Yuder, who was hanging over his back.

“What’s the matter, First Princess? In such a situation, it would be better for you to be in a safe place.”

“It’s just that… I came here upon hearing that you finally emerged after confronting Nahan and Hosanna… But are you alright?”

Her grey eyes alternated between scanning Kishiar’s torn and bloody clothes and Yuder’s bloodied face. Kishiar chuckled softly, tilting his head.

“If I could confidently say that we are alright, it would be great, but we hardly look the part, do we?”

“I can immediately bring a priest from outside…!”

“No, that’s alright. You don’t look well yourself, and I can’t keep you standing here for long. Let the priest finish their duty and then attend to our men.”

“But Baron Aile’s condition is…”

“…I may look like this, but I’m fine. It’s just that I had to come here in this state due to the Commander’s concern, so please don’t worry.”

Only after Yuder, who was still perched on Kishiar’s back, managed to squeeze out a word with some embarrassment, did Myra speak her purpose.

“You may have heard, but Nahan is my father’s illegitimate child. I’ve roughly heard about the heinous crimes he’s committed… If he’s dead, I was hoping to ask if you could give me a chance to help with the aftermath.”

“…”

“In fact, I wanted to personally apologize for what our Herne family has done to him… but the situation is complicated…”

Myra seemed to be trying not to show her emotions. However, Yuder saw the guilt and responsibility she was carrying. How could Kishiar, seeing the same, not understand?

After a moment of silence, the man turned his head slightly and asked.

“What does the assistant think?”

This wasn’t about the ‘cleanup’ itself. It was about revealing that Nahan was still stubbornly alive and whether to allow Myra a brief, distant glimpse of him.

Considering Nahan’s danger, it was obviously not advisable. Yet, Yuder recalled Nahan, who had finally found his target for revenge, and the grey eyes that had last looked into his, muttering they resembled his brother.

If he wasn’t mistaken, the faint emotion in those cloudy eyes was longing - a longing for a specific person, though not solely that.

Perhaps underlying it all was the revenge of one betrayed yet hoping for trust, and an abnormal fixation on the concept of siblings.

Nahan must have long wondered about his blood ties and roots. Those deep feelings remained even after his awakening, leading to an obsession with the word itself and the relationships it entailed.

Nahan and Myra were relatives who had never met, one side unaware of the other’s existence. Such a brief encounter might seem meaningless, but Yuder hesitated briefly, considering that now might be the only chance.

“It’s risky, so keeping them separate until the end would be wise… But you might as well inform her.”

“Is that so?”

“Why do you say that?”

Myra, sensing something dubious in their conversation, looked puzzled.

“The cleanup itself won’t be difficult to manage together. It’s just that Nahan isn’t dead yet. He seems close to it, though.”

“Yes?!”

Startled, Myra’s eyes widened in disbelief, and then she spoke with a trembling voice.

“Then, is it possible for me to meet him? I…”

Her request came without a hint of hesitation. Despite anticipating such a response from Myra, Yuder felt an odd sensation.

“I must make it clear that he is truly dangerous. He’s nearly dead, so it won’t be a pleasant sight. Moreover, he was burning with vengeance against the Herne family after learning of his origin. Even so?”

“Even if from a great distance, it’s fine. I want to personally apologize for what the Herne family has done to him. Is that not possible? I promise, whatever happens, the Cavalry will not be held responsible!”

Kishiar fell silent for a moment. The position of a leader demands the continuous selection of the best course amidst complex situations. Yuder could clearly sense the struggle in Kishiar’s thoughts.

Eventually, Kishiar nodded in agreement.

“If it’s only to convey that intention, I’ll permit it. Kanna, since I was planning to send you anyway, go with the First Princess. However, if Nahan has died en route, only you will assist in the cleanup, and the First Princess must return immediately.”

“Understood.”

“Thank you.”

Kanna and First Princess Myra soon departed. Yuder, still perched on Kishiar's back, exhaled deeply and gazed up again at the cracks in the sky.

"…Hearing Kanna's story and seeing those, it leads me to one conclusion. I think the Commander might have thought similarly."

"Let's hear it first."

"Aton mentioned that the land in the south had already become 'unbalanced' due to the previous incident. Today's events occurred under such conditions, and now, with the changing weather, several strange cracks have appeared."

The previous incident in the southern branch involved the exhaustion of the lives and magic of southern merchants, leading to an anomalous crack.

Suppose this acted as the 'key' to the 'unbalance' of the southern land, opening the 'box' filled with disaster and chaos, known as 'anomalous cracks.'

The box had already been opened by the earlier incident. The fact that it wouldn't easily close, even after eliminating one crack at the branch, was evident from Aton's reaction after being captured.

What if the quietude until now was merely due to the lack of a shock strong enough to shake the box, and any slight disturbance could spill its contents at any time?

And if the conditions for this disturbance were not limited to magic or life but could also include other factors?

"Then, all the abnormal phenomena today… began because we, the Awakeners, clashed, exerting our powers and disturbing the surroundings, and gradually intensified."

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Chapter 850

“Then, all the abnormal phenomena today… began because we, the Awakeners, clashed, exerting our powers and disturbing the surroundings, and gradually intensified.”

If his thinking was correct, the powers used by the Awakeners, including himself, might have actually worsened the overall situation. However, it was inevitable when the sage and Nahan confronted each other. How could it have not led to the current outcome?

As he bit his lip and took a deep breath, Kishiar finally opened his mouth.

“What about the previous game? Just before the appearance of the abnormal crack, to what extent was there an abnormal flow of immense power? Were cracks and monsters always accompanying phenomena?”

“I can’t give a definite answer to the first part since I haven’t confirmed it as clearly as this time. But I believe similar incidents have been occurring for years without being noticed by anyone, including me. As for the cracks and monsters… No, they were not always accompanied.”

Yuder distinctly remembers that the abnormal cracks sightings began with the Southern Earthquake, but not much before that. Even before the earthquake, the continent had already seen a significantly higher frequency of monster occurrences, incomparable to now. Some of these might have been related to monsters pouring out of the cracks, but now it’s impossible to be certain.

Anyway, according to Yuder’s memory, these abnormal cracks sporadically appeared in various regions, usually before or after diverse disasters struck. They were random in both time and place, and most witnesses often doubted whether what they saw was real, making it difficult to ascertain the frequency of these occurrences.

“Monsters did not always emerge where the cracks appeared. However, I am certain that disasters invariably struck soon after in the vicinity of these cracks.”

“Then the recent deluge of monsters was an uncommon occurrence. Perhaps it was because it was ‘the first beginning.’ To use your analogy, like unlocking and opening a box for the first time?”

“That might be possible.”

“If today’s imbalance only results in this unusual weather change and the emergence of the cracks, it would be fortunate for us. But if monsters appear like last time, it will be a serious problem.”

The reason was simple. Neither Kishiar nor Yuder have the capacity to perform as they did the last time.

After finishing, Kishiar, gazing up at the crack, broke the silence.

“If Aton and his allies aim to disrupt balance and bring disaster and chaos, then the more the balance is disturbed, the more we can assume something will emerge. It’s like initially, there was just a little sleet, which gradually turned into hail, and finally, the crack appeared.”

Listening to Kishiar’s words, Yuder reflected on the day’s events, aligning them with the anomalies.

When the funeral was about to begin, the sleet seemed to pause and almost stop. The situation began to seriously worsen when Nahan and the sage started clashing. The sky darkened completely, and fierce winds blew, coinciding almost exactly with Kishiar’s intervention in Nahan’s rampage using Gakane’s Shadow Curtain and striking a massive wall.

According to Kanna, the sleet then fully developed into hail, and the cracks appeared around the time Yuder spared no effort in using his powers to confront Nahan.

“Indeed. If we can prevent any further destabilization of the balance here, we might be able to manage a recovery.”

“That would be ideal, but…”

Muttering to himself, Kishiar suddenly posed another question.

“Yuder, what do you think is the biggest difference between the time when monsters poured out of the abnormal crack and now?”

“Back then, magic was used as a key to disrupt the balance, and there were numerous deaths, almost like a sacrifice by the Awakeners. This time, neither has happened.”

“True. Today, no magic was used, and no one died. But isn’t that just ‘so far’?”

“Do you mean to suggest that if Nahan dies, monsters might appear?”

It was a possibility. There was no absolute certainty in any of this. But after a moment of contemplation, Yuder shook his head.

“However, Nahan’s power has almost entirely drained away. If he were to die explosively, it might be a different story, but if he dies quietly, it’s unlikely that his death alone would cause enough disturbance to unleash monsters from the crack. It’s different from before.”

“I wasn’t referring to Nahan, but to Hosanna.”

At that, Yuder’s eyebrows twitched momentarily.

“I see. I had momentarily forgotten about him. If he awakens and goes on a rampage like Nahan, we’ll have no time to contain it. Then, it really will be…”

Hosanna’s abilities were in disarray, having been forcibly used again, to the point where he couldn’t travel long distances. In that state, even if he went on a rampage, he couldn’t unleash the same level of power as Nahan.

But one mustn’t forget that he had shown enough power to rupture Alik’s suppression device. The thought that these abnormal cracks might spew out the same, or perhaps even more, monsters with just a tiny ripple sent a chill down his spine.

Last time, there was one crack. This time, there were three.

“We should probably head back.”

Just as Kishiar turned to leave, thinking the same thing, it happened.

Thump.

A sensation of a massive flow of power settling in descended upon them. It was so intense that even the exhausted Yuder reflexively reacted.

‘It’s…!’

“Nahan!”

The distinctive force of an enemy one has confronted before can be recognized later on. Especially the power of one who had been in a state of disarray, which he had just been facing to the point of nausea.

“Ah!”

With his senses on high alert, Yuder caught the faint sound of a scream amidst the intense noise of hail smashing against the ground. Clearly, something chaotic was happening.

Had sending Myra away been a mistake?

Without responding, Kishiar immediately turned and leaped. Even carrying Yuder, his movements were unrestricted, light, and fast. The muddy ground, deep enough to be unbelievable from a human’s step, tried to cling to their ankles, and the fierce wind lashed at their skin, but nothing could stop them.

An invisible flow of force enveloped them, pushing them towards their destination. Worried about Kishiar using his abilities again, Yuder remained

silent, focusing only on his vision.

After several leaps, they soon returned to the place they had just left.

The scene before them was complete chaos.

Amidst a pool of bright red blood, the swirling aura of power, the Cavalry members seemingly using their abilities to counteract it, and between them, Myra stood bewildered, surrounded by screaming non-Awakener masses.

It was clear that just a while ago, this place had been occupied solely by the Cavalry and their allies. Who were these people now?

“Please, let me down. Kanna!”

Yuder disembarked from Kishiar’s back and sought out Kanna. Near Myra, Kanna, who had been continuously shouting while protecting her, turned her head. Her face and body were stained with blood.

“Yuder!”

“What’s happened here?”

“Duke-Duke Herne is dead! Killed by Nahan…!”

Kanna’s voice quivered as she shouted, her face ashen. Yuder glanced once more at the blood behind her, then asked in an even colder voice.

“What do you mean? Nahan killed Duke Herne?”

“It seemed the Duke’s side learned of First Princess Myra’s whereabouts as she came to negotiate with Nahan. Suddenly, he appeared leading a group of people and…”

…

“Nahan. I am Myra El Herne, the first daughter of the Herne family.”

Myra’s voice, transmitted from afar through Kanna and the Cavalry members. Nahan’s eyelids, nearly closed in death, twitched and moved in response.

“I’ve heard of your existence before. What I want to say is… I’m sorry that my family couldn’t rescue you when I first learned about you.”

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Chapter 851

“I’ve actually heard of your existence before. What I want to say is… I’m sorry that my family couldn’t rescue you when I first learned about you.”

Her words came out unorganized and hasty, a result of her heart racing with the realization that this might be her only chance. She couldn’t afford the luxury of choosing her words carefully or maintaining the barriers befitting her status and position.

The Cavalry members remained on high alert, wary of any aggressive response from Nahan, but surprisingly, he merely blinked slowly a few times with empty eyes and slightly turned his head towards the source of the sound, making no other movement.

Was he listening? Just as Kanna thought this, Myra, her throat tense with nerves, continued speaking in a slightly shaky voice.

“I’ve always regretted not learning more about you back then. I don’t know what happened to you in our family to lead you to your current state, but I can guess to some extent. The anger and hatred you harbor towards our family seem justified.”

“…”

“I never expected to meet you again like this, in such a place, and I’m not sure if you can even hear me now… but I felt like I had to say this now or never.”

I’m sorry. Myra bowed her head, standing at a distance from where Nahan lay, with Kanna in front of her.

Nahan, who looked almost like a corpse, lay there without any reaction, just listening. The faint, ghostly illusions that barely clung to his body were silent, indicating that only he knew what he was thinking.

But not being able to understand his thoughts didn’t mean one couldn’t feel anything. At least, Kanna Wand felt that way.

In the silence, Kanna surprisingly did not sense any pain, rough anger, or hatred. Throughout her many experiences using her abilities to help her comrades trace Nahan’s steps, she had never encountered such a situation before. It was astonishing to find such calmness in someone who, until their last moment, had been a whirlwind of harsh and terrible emotions.

“Lady Myra, if you have finished delivering your message, we should leave now. Do you have anything more to say?”

“…May I say more?”

Kanna glanced towards Nahan and sighed.

“Normally, it wouldn’t be allowed, but… it seems okay for now. Just for a bit.”

If there had been any hint of danger in Nahan’s silence, Kanna would not have permitted it, but the silence now spoke of a complex inner turmoil, similar to what Yuder felt when thinking about Myra and Nahan.

With Kanna’s permission, Myra hesitated for a moment before speaking again.

“You might not be curious, but… the funeral held here today was for my half-brother, Ashrav, who was killed by some Awakeners while he was trying to collaborate with the Cavalry. And now, here I am, facing the death of another half-blood at the same place. He is an Awakener… Strange, isn’t it?”

Myra spoke without tears, but those who saw her up close could tell she had cried a lot, drenched as she was in the sleet.

“Right now, I… I keep thinking, what if I had gone to meet you a bit sooner? I’ll probably live with that thought for the rest of my life.”

“…”

“If given the chance… I would ensure that the events of today never repeat under the name of Herne again,” she expressed her desire, her voice faint but determined.

Suddenly, a sharp voice interrupted Myra’s strained words. “I wondered why you fled so hastily alone, Myra. What are you doing now?”

Struggling to continue, Myra was caught off guard by this interruption. “You shouldn’t come here, it’s dangerous!”

“Is there anywhere in the South I cannot go?”

Kanna turned her head to find Duke Herne unexpectedly appearing. She frowned at the sight of him; even their brief encounter earlier had left her feeling his rotten interior, despite his beautiful exterior. And now, he had appeared here again.

Moreover, Duke Herne was not alone; he was leading a large entourage. Two servants held a large umbrella almost as big as a tent over him, and sturdy knights surrounded him to shield him from the hail.

There were even those laying cloth on the ground to prevent his shoes from getting muddy. It was an unbelievably grand procession, almost too grand to believe even while witnessing it.

“Running away from everyone to apologize to a violent criminal in Herne’s name? Do you think yourself the master of Herne now?”

“Is that all you came here to say?” Myra retorted.

“Just that. If those who trusted you heard this, they would be greatly disappointed. Interestingly enough.”

The Cavalry members tried to make Duke Herne retreat, but he wouldn’t budge, seemingly eager to seize the opportunity to discredit his rebellious heir. In the midst of their dilemma, unable to use their power against a non-Awakener, Myra cried out in an agitated voice.

“Father! Any other day, I might understand, but please, not today. Do you know who that person is?”

“Why should I know that?”

“He is your child too, Father! One of your countless illegitimate children, a Southern mixed you kept locked away so thoroughly that he couldn’t even go outside, remember?”

At this, Duke Herne momentarily shifted his lofty gaze to glance at Nahan, obscured by the foul weather and the members. He might not have seen clearly, but he could discern enough to recognize the burnt face and the hair color indicating Southern bloodline.

Then, Duke Herne turned away and said indifferently, “A Southern bastard? You should moderate your words that insult your parents. Had it not been your words, I would not have forgiven the insult to the name of Duke of Herne.”

“Father, do you truly believe that none of what has happened, including the ruin of Ashrav’s funeral and the events of today, is your fault?”

“Myra.”

“If this is an insult, then punish me as you will. But I will keep saying the same thing until you apologize to that person. Herne has wronged too many children, children who had no choice in where they were born. How do you intend to atone for those sins, Father?”

“Myra!”

Slap. Myra’s cheek was struck.

For a moment, everyone held their breath. Duke Herne, who had struck his daughter’s cheek, sneered with a colder gaze than anyone else’s.

“It’s preposterous. You dare to bring up such baseless rumors here, relying on the mere backing of the Duke of Peletta and the Cavalry. You will be

confined immediately upon your return. And a Southern bastard? Even if such a filthy thing exists, who would remember it!”

“Don’t think I’m speaking without knowledge. You may silence those who want to pretend it never happened, but there will always be those who remember the truth. The existence of that person is no different…!”

Kanna stepped in front of Myra, blocking Duke Herne who had raised his hand as if to strike her cheek again. Duke Herne, looking at Kanna as if she were an insect obstructing his path, gave her a withering look before turning away.

“You claim to be Herne’s heir, yet you have no understanding of the weight that Herne’s blood carries.”

“…”

“If all the vermin could become Herne, there would never be a Herne like today. And now, a vermin tainted with filthy Southern blood thinks to receive an apology just because it shares a bit of my blood? You are disgracing our family name.”

Duke Herne turned and stepped out from under the umbrella. His servants hesitated, unsure whether to follow or not. The Duke walked a few steps towards Nahan and looked down in disgust at his bloodied, swollen body.

“You must not come closer!”

“Why hasn’t the Cavalry killed this captured rebel yet? Are you hoping to extract any weaknesses of Herne from him? If so, I’ll do it myself…”

As Duke Herne began to speak, Kanna made a decision.

This was too much. Despite the risks of meddling with a non-Awakener noble, she had to intervene.

“Everyone, escort Duke Herne outside…!”

“Father!”

“Everyone…!”

In that moment of chaos, with Duke Herne’s knights, Myra, Kanna, each about to speak their mind, a tremendous force erupted from Nahan, who had been lying silently. It engulfed Duke Herne.

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Chapter 852

From the quietly fallen Nahan, a tremendous power burst forth, overwhelming Duke Herne. The terrifying aspect of mental abilities lies in their near impossibility to be blocked. An invisible, formless power is difficult to counter, even for fellow Awakeners, let alone for those without any power.

Struck squarely by the abilities emanating from Nahan, Duke Herne froze as if struck by lightning.

His eyes wide open. A dreadful silence pierced through for a moment.

Shortly after, the Duke's body stiffened like a log, trembling uncontrollably. His grey eyes rolled back, and a groan, barely resembling speech, escaped his lips.

"G-g-g…"

Then, an explosion.

Kanna Wand momentarily fainted from the overwhelming burst of information emanating from Duke Herne.

By the time her companions, who had rushed to her calling her name, managed to revive her, everything was already over…

"It felt like reading a person's entire life in an instant, no. It was like centuries of time compressed and unleashed in a single moment. And those centuries were filled with nothing but pain and fear… Do you understand?"

After her explanation, Kanna, pale-faced, struggled to describe the sensations she had last felt. It was an abstract description, but Yuder immediately understood its meaning.

"I know what it is. I've seen that attack before."

He had felt a similar sensation when Nahan last attacked him. A blink of an eye stretched into an eternity, and in that eternity, he experienced all the pain he had ever felt, infinitely.

Yuder endured it, but Duke Herne did not.

As a result, the Duke, as if having swallowed a bomb, was covered in clots of blood, dying instantly, turning into a pool of blood. His death, though brief from an outsider's perspective, must have felt like an endless repetition of centuries of accumulated fear and pain, just as Kanna described.

It was the most terrifying revenge that only Nahan could execute.

Yuder turned his gaze toward where Nahan had been, over the unrecognizable pile of blood. The faint, eerie energy that had been emanating from there was no longer visible.

A lifeless body.

"…"

Yuder remained silent for a moment before turning his eyes back to Kanna. She was covered in blood splattered from Duke Herne's death, but the reflection in her blue eyes made her look even more battered.

"…It's not your fault. We need to clean up first. You should…"

Boom.

Suddenly, the air vibrated intensely again.

This vibration was similar yet different from the immense power felt during Duke Herne's death. It originated from above, precisely from the cracks in the sky.

Instincts, like those of a small animal in the presence of a great predator, warned of danger. People, staggering with the thrill running from head to toe, raised their heads to discover three expanding cracks in the sky,

resembling the eyes of a massive demon, and something indescribable writhing within like worms.

“What is that, what?!”

“Oh God…”

Those still shocked by the recent events screamed reflexively. Panic ensued, with people clutching their heads, running away, or falling into a state of breathlessness from the overwhelming fear.

Yuder bit his lip hard as he observed the scene. It hadn’t been long since he had expressed his hope to Kishiar that things could be resolved just as they were, yet now, the cracks were opening.

‘Damn that Duke Herne…’

Though dead, Yuder felt an overwhelming urge to beat him once more and then bury him with his own hands. What was the reasoning of a man who valued his life so dearly that he wouldn’t even venture into the capital, to come crawling to his own deathbed?

Shouldn’t one at least try to preserve one’s life?

Even if it was a dying Awakener, an Awakener was still an Awakener. They possess a power and danger incomparable to the non-Awakeners. It had been a long time since Yuder had felt so acutely that the people of this era truly understood neither the significance of this power nor its implications. The world before his eyes, which had just calmed with the help of divine power, swirled dizzily once again.

‘First… no monsters have emerged yet. If we can find a way to close the cracks in this state, and then…’

Boom!

Suddenly, there was the sound of the air settling. The crack widened a bit more, and hail began to pound heavily on his shoulders and back.

‘What? Nahan and Duke Herne are dead, and yet the cracks are opening again…?’

“Yuder. Behind!”

A man’s voice, unmistakable from anywhere, reached Yuder’s ears as he stared at the cracks. Swiftly turning his head, Yuder glimpsed a shadow hunched like a tomb amidst the cascading avalanche of ice, and he hesitated for a moment.

“…”

A twisted figure, shrouded in an ominous aura, weeping blood-stained tears with sunken eyes. The last being Yuder had hoped would not appear in this situation, Hosanna, was there.

“Ah…”

Hosanna’s hollow, sunken eyes gazed deeply at the pool of blood spreading wide and Nahan’s body lying submerged in it. His trembling body blurred and flickered, disappearing and reappearing continuously.

Seeing the Cavalry members approaching from a distance, Yuder instinctively realized that Hosanna had used his powers to get here.

‘Damn it.’

It was the worst-case scenario. Nahan had killed Duke Herne, and now, of all times, Hosanna had discovered the scene.

“Ahahah…”

The ongoing cries rapidly intensified. A strong premonition of an imminent rampage sent shivers through his skin.

Like a lantern flickering on and off, the eerie and unstable aura instinctively made his skin crawl.

“Ah… Ahahah… Ahahahaha!!”

The agonizing, heart-wrenching screams unnaturally amplified, turning the falling hail into explosive bombs. Yuder reflexively gathered his strength to create a protective barrier of wind around him.

“Ugh…”

Puff-puff-puff. Numerous chunks of ice bombarded the shield, followed by a tremendous shock. Yuder forcibly swallowed the blood welling up inside him. The whirlwind of hail spinning wildly near Hosanna was so powerful that even a single touch could severely injure a non-Awakener.

“Yuder!”

“Don’t come to me… evacuate quickly!”

Under normal circumstances, it might have been different, but in this situation, it was uncertain how perfectly he could maintain the shield. He gestured to Kanna, who was approaching to help, to stay away and pointed towards Myra, who was still sitting dazedly, prompting Kanna to clench her teeth and back away.

“…Your Highness!”

Yuder frowned at the impact of the hail battering the shield as he watched Kanna move away. Defending against the hail was already taxing, and he couldn’t properly focus on the increasingly thunderous pressure and the cracks overhead.

‘Damn it.’

To make matters worse, a hailstone the size of a fist struck his forehead, eliciting a curse as he staggered. Then, a large hand reached out, enveloping Yuder’s shoulder and head.

“Are you alright?”

Kishiar asked emotionlessly, wiping the blood from Yuder’s forehead. His own face and body were also battered and scratched due to the intensifying

hail. Yuder felt a surge of warmth inside him, seeing Kishiar, unattended to his own injuries, solely focused on him.

Yuder swallowed hard before replying.

“…Yes. I’m fine.”

“How much longer can you hold it?”

“Actually, rather than holding it… I think it would be better to quickly kill that one over there…”

Before he could finish his sentence, another onslaught of hail from Hosanna’s direction battered the shield, swirling madly. Even as Yuder waved his hand roughly to reinforce the shield, it appeared precarious. Grinding his teeth, attempting to muster more strength, Kishiar grasped his hand.

Immediately, an invisible force enveloped Yuder’s power, reinforcing the wind barrier. It felt as though a stronger wall was pushing back the internal turmoil from the outside.

Only then did Yuder exhale. His body felt relieved, but his heart grew heavier. It meant that as much as he was eased, Kishiar was being strained further.

“I’m fine. You should head towards the cracks; They’re opening.”

“…I’m still okay. Nathan is there.”

Kishiar answered coldly. His gaze wasn’t on Yuder but on the wind barrier, watching Hosanna crawling on the ground amidst the hailstones.

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Chapter 853

Kishiar answered coldly. His gaze wasn't on Yuder but on the wind barrier, watching Hosanna crawling on the ground amidst the hailstones.

"Young Master…! Young Master!"

Soaked in muddy water, Hosanna clawed and tore at the ground, crawling towards Nahan. His form flickered faster and faster. Kishiar, having noticed this, muttered in a low voice.

"We must deal with him as quickly as possible before the cracks fully open. What do you think is the best way to kill him?"

Yuder's expression twisted. Kishiar had no intention of backing down here. He had decided to kill Hosanna, together with Yuder.

But Yuder himself knew it was the best course of action when he thought about it logically, so he reluctantly decided not to ask to retreat.

If it must be done, it's better to do it quickly.

"…We must stab the vital point in one go. It's different from when I dealt with Nahan. The backlash will come immediately upon killing him."

"It would be best to attack from a distance… but looking at the way the hail is moving, it seems our abilities might not be well-suited against the opponent."

The situation was undeniably less severe than Nahan's rampage, but the problem was that Hosanna, with his ability to teleport, was present in the midst of this hailstorm, which could hit and injure just by being there.

'If only the weather had been normal, it wouldn't have been this threatening.'

Hosanna was currently moving the hail like a whirlwind, but it seemed more like his movement ability had gone berserk, rapidly transporting objects around him as if snatching them.

It looked almost like telekinesis, but this ability was actually making each piece of hail disappear momentarily, only to reappear in unpredictable locations, making it even more troublesome and unpredictable.

What if one approaches recklessly and gets hit by the hail moved by Hosanna? What if it embeds in a hard-to-reach place like the head or the internal organs?…

The mere thought was terrifying, but it wasn't impossible. From experience, such situations often turn out worse than the worst imagined.

"Yes. So, as soon as the barrier is down, one of us should attack from a distance, and the other from close range. I will take the close range."

Yuder quickly volunteered, anticipating that Kishiar might choose close combat.

"Please use your aura, Commander."

"…Understood."

The man nodded after looking down at Yuder for a moment. He seemed confident that Yuder had accepted his 'best' just as he had accepted Yuder's.

After quickly exchanging opinions, Yuder stepped away from Kishiar, waiting for the right moment to lower the barrier. The first thing he saw was some arrogant fools, who, despite being ordered to evacuate, were not evacuating and instead were pointing fingers at Kanna.

"Why is the Cavalry only running away? Why isn't anyone here retrieving the body of Duke Herne?"

"We've instructed everyone to evacuate due to the emergency. There's a dangerous person in there."

“We said we would do it if you wouldn’t! Why won’t you let us go?”

“Just break through! Go and retrieve the Duke!”

Such bravado and foolish actions.

Before the knights, who dashed forth without a moment’s hesitation, could reach their intended target, they locked eyes with someone amidst the bizarre hailstorm. Glimpsing the twisted, emaciated eyes of a young man from the southern lands, they instinctively furrowed their brows, their breath catching in the instant.

“Wha… What?”

Despite not yet breaking through the barrier, suddenly, their limbs disappeared as if cleanly sliced by a sharp blade. Moments later, the arms and legs, still seemingly in motion, reappeared at a nearby spot, only to drop to the ground with a thud.

“What…?!”

Stunned by the surreal scene, the knights, still twitching as if running, alternated their gaze between their floating limbs and themselves, eventually entangling and collapsing into each other.

Shock came first, followed by screams.

“Aaaagh!”

As blood burst from the reappeared limbs and torsos, they met their gruesome demise in an instant.

The one protesting to Kanna was struck dumb, helplessly collapsing upon witnessing the death of five knights.

“Ugh… Ah… Aaagh…!”

Kanna’s expression, as she watched the scene, was as cold as a corpse.

Yuder too, with a face colder than hers, stared at the corpses.

It always happens like this. No matter how much they are warned and prepared, there are always those who court death in such a manner. The ones who suffer are those who, despite their efforts to prevent it, end up having to clean up the aftermath.

Perhaps, it's a reminder that some things in this world, no matter how hard one tries, cannot be stopped.

"…"

Unknown, but one thing was certain.

The near-suicidal deaths of these fools made it clearer just how dangerous Hosanna's movement ability could be. Fortunately, there was no longer a need for Kanna or the other Cavalry to warn anyone. The commotion caused by the protest had turned the evacuation quiet and efficient.

Kanna, not the least bit surprised, said to Yuder,

"…Yuder. I'll finish cleaning up the rest quickly, so don't push yourself. We'll be right behind you."

"…"

"If you get more hurt, no matter what you say, I'll intervene."

Yuder looked at her and slowly nodded.

The sickening sensation that had surged within him slowly dissipated upon hearing her words.

In the distance, Hosanna's cries and wails resonated.

'…I've never heard of a movement ability that can displace someone's limbs like this, but I have no intention of losing mine.'

Thud. Thud. The immense pressure continued from above, but there was still no sign of the monster.

‘I’ll decisively sever the neck before Hosanna notices me.’

Yuder cracked his neck and drew his sword.

After confirming that almost everyone had evacuated, he turned to Kishiar. Unlike before, where he had been expressionless, Kishiar now faintly lifted the corners of his mouth as he looked at Yuder.

It wasn’t a smile of pleasure.

Kishiar, in fact, tended to smile more in adverse situations.

But that smile helped Yuder halt the unnecessary thoughts growing in his mind and regain his focus.

‘Right…’

Prioritizing ending everything without further damaging Kishiar’s vessel was all that filled his thoughts now.

The moment Yuder saw Kanna retreating to the rear, he dissolved the defensive barrier he had been maintaining to its limit.

-Boom!

With a tremendous burst of pressure, the hailstones that had been raging inside suddenly poured out. Believing that the Cavalry would handle it well, he stomped on the ground.

A single leap, stepping on the wind. His golden eyes, shining in the darkness and amidst the hail, accurately pinpointed Hosanna’s location.

Hosanna was hunched over, embracing Nahan, muttering something. The sound, barely audible, trickled slowly into Yuder’s heightened senses.

“…Young Master, I will… send you off. I will…”

The energy, on the verge of exploding, flickered. Yuder, twisting in mid-air, swung his sword toward Hosanna's head.

Simultaneously, Kishiar also released his aura with precise timing.

If all went as expected, the two forces would converge and sever Hosanna's neck.

If all went as expected, that is.

There's always an unexpected variable in the affairs of the world.

Just as his blade was about to strike, Yuder locked eyes with Hosanna.

In that moment, his vision whirled upside down.

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Chapter 854

Before Yuder could even think of a response, he was violently thrown back by a bright blue aura that shot toward him head-on. It was a semicircular blade energy released by none other than Kishiar.

Someone screamed, but there was no time to check towards Kishiar.

The window for decision was incredibly brief. Yuder, without halting his sword aimed at Hosanna, swung it forcefully enough to tear his arm's muscles, setting the blade askew to confront the oncoming aura-

Boom!!

An immense shock hit his entire body.

It felt vaguely like the time he had fallen off a cliff and crashed into a river.

The shock was so intense that it evoked such distant memories. Yuder was sent flying like a leaf caught in a fierce wind.

The plan was, in essence, optimal. From Hosanna's position, Kishiar's bright blue aura would have been the first thing seen. Any average person would find it impossible to make a sound judgment in the face of a true swordmaster's aura.

Even if he managed to avoid the incoming aura using his abilities, dodging Yuder, who attacked like a bolt from a blind spot, would be even more impossible. Conversely, if Hosanna sensed Yuder's attack first and responded, then Kishiar's aura would have hit its target without a chance to escape.

The entire sequence would happen in less time than it takes to blink.

The plan was the fastest and most concise, and therefore, impossible to evade. It was far from a simple attack that could be easily blocked by

someone crazed with grief and on the brink of rampage.

However, Hosanna noticed Yuder charging from the blind spot first, and immediately teleported him right into Kishiar’s aura, striking a critical blow.

It was like a strategy game where moving a single piece caused the enemies to collide from front and back.

“Damn it.”

Hosanna, not being familiar with combat, must have been lucky, but thanks to that, Yuder had the unprecedented experience of confronting Kishiar’s aura head-on.

Swept away by the tremendous force, he was unable to regain his senses, but his extensive experience told him that a secondary impact would soon follow as he crashed to the ground. The moment he had faced Kishiar’s formidable aura head-on, his feeble defense shattered instantly, leaving him to rely on his well-practiced falling technique. Yuder braced himself, clenching his teeth tightly.

But, as expected, his body did not crash into the ground or any terrain.

His flying form suddenly slowed as if caught by an invisible force. Just before Yuder twisted in mid-air and began to fall slower, a man swooped in like an arrow and caught him. Together, they rolled on the ground as one entity.

“Cough, hack, cough!”

His body, scraped against the ground battered by sleet and hail, felt numb and on the verge of passing out.

Yuder’s vision flickered, but he barely managed to grit his teeth and lift his head. The person embracing him from behind, undoubtedly, was Kishiar.

The moment he saw the man’s face, almost bloodied and pale as a corpse with closed eyes, Yuder felt his heart momentarily stop. He hurriedly

wriggled out of Kishiar’s embrace and stood up.

Swallowing hard, Yuder attempted to raise his arms but found his body uncooperative. It was only when he lowered his gaze that he realized his sword had been flung away and his arms hung awkwardly, as if broken.

Indeed, the aura unleashed was no ordinary force. It was an attack from a swordsman who had left a mark rivaling that of the first emperor, hailed as the greatest swordmaster in history, for the first time in a thousand years. In his previous life, Yuder had never encountered a swordmaster with such formidable power. It was inevitable that he suffered these consequences, having hastily blocked such a powerful strike with a single sword, without proper defense.

Fortunately, his exceptionally sturdy sword had absorbed most of the shock, sparing him from worse damage.

“…Commander…”

As he gritted his teeth and gasped for air, Kishiar slowly opened his eyes. At that moment, fresh blood trickled down from beneath his nose.

Internal injuries were worse than external ones, and it was common for those with internal injuries to bleed from the nose first.

Exhausted, Kishiar’s golden eyes flickered as he scanned Yuder’s body. Although his vision was blurred and judgments unclear, he instinctively knew that Yuder’s condition was dire.

-Yuder.

As Yuder intently observed Kishiar’s interior, a faint call reached his ears. It was softer than the sound of hail breaking but thunderous to Yuder.

Lifting his gaze to meet Kishiar’s red eyes, Kishiar asked,

“…Are you alright? How’s your condition?”

Was that really the first thing he would ask in such a situation?

Yuder felt a surge of anger. Did he appear to be someone who couldn’t withstand a single aura strike and was on the brink of death? Why did Kishiar prioritize saving him over his own critical condition?

The notion infuriated Yuder, and though his lips trembled, he remained silent.

The reason was simple.

Yuder Aile understood better than anyone why Kishiar had rushed to his aid.

This realization infuriated Yuder even more.

Struggling to breathe and unable to respond, Kishiar’s lips faintly twitched upwards before settling back down. Lying down, he weakly gestured towards Yuder’s back.

“…I anticipated this might happen and was prepared. But once the aura is unleashed, even I can’t completely… Anyway…”

“Don’t speak.”

“Look behind.”

Barely turning his head, Yuder saw Hosanna lying on the ground, an arm severed. Though not yet dead, the intensity of the hailstorm swirling around him was significantly diminished compared to before.

In the distance, the Cavalry members fought desperately to break through.

Hosanna, with an arm severed, signified one thing.

After syncing with Yuder and releasing an aura, Kishiar realized his failure and launched a second, more potent attack. Having already strained himself with two long-range attacks, which demanded immense power even for a swordmaster, Kishiar had then used his Awakener’s abilities to save Yuder, leading to their current predicament.

Yuder’s head spun dizzily.

“…This is as far as my strategy goes. In the end, I couldn’t finish it off clearly because of the erratic wind. So, the real ending… I think I’ll have to ask for help.”

“…”

“Is it possible?”

Yuder bowed his head, catching sight of his disheveled arm. Thankfully, his tattered ceremonial robe covered it, making the extent of the injury underneath less apparent.

Thanks to his magic-infused gloves, at least his wrists and fingers remained unscathed, more so than any other part of his body in this situation. Yuder slowly clenched and unclenched his fingers. Despite the spine-chilling pain that crept up his back, he could still hold a sword.

Yes, if his fingers were intact, he could wield a sword.

In even worse situations, he had always risen, advanced, and successfully employed his abilities to achieve his goals.

Why should this time be any different?

Without turning his head, Yuder reached out his hand. Moments later, a sword flew to him from somewhere, landing firmly in his grasp. It was covered in dirt, but the blade was still sharp. Yuder clenched the familiar handle.

But before standing up, he had something to say to Kishiar.

He looked at Kishiar more intensely than ever before, both fiercely and coldly, and spoke.

“Stay exactly as you are until I return from finishing this. If you use your powers again, even if you are the Commander, I will not forgive you.”

Kishiar’s eyes widened slightly.

After a moment, he closed his mouth, relaxed his eyebrows, and exhaled thinly. With a bittersweet, loving, and strangely joyful smile, he slowly nodded his head.

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Chapter 855

Yuder turned his back on Kishiar, leaving him behind. Although it was sheer willpower that moved his body beyond its limits, the presence that fortified this resolve was right behind him.

If he were to fall here, Kishiar's efforts and the risks he took to save him would all be in vain. It was this sole thought, coupled with an indescribable fiery emotion-perhaps anger-that enabled Yuder to forget all pain and walk upright.

Hosanna, despite his arm being severed and drenched in blood, had somehow flipped his body over and then crawled on the ground, inching forward little by little. With each small advance driven by his incredible willpower, his blood drew straight lines on the ground, painting it red. Despite the intensity of the hailstorm weakening, it still danced mercilessly around them.

Yuder saw the Cavalry members moving haphazardly, trying to block the swirling hail and counterattack.

Even though the strength of the hail had waned, the situation was still too fierce for anyone to break through to where Kishiar and Yuder were. Nonetheless, each member, pushing their abilities to the limit, relentlessly attacked Hosanna. Not a single one turned their back to flee.

Among them, Kanna, who lacked combat skills but stood at the frontline, bellowing commands, caught Yuder's eye.

No matter how much training the Cavalry had undergone, someone's command was essential for synchronized action. The presence of a leader, assessing the overall situation and signaling from the front, made a real difference in chaotic circumstances. And Kanna was performing this role exceptionally well. Despite knowing the dangers of being out front without any means of defense, she fiercely shouted orders and waved her injured hand, executing her role with a desperation unmatched by others.

Although Yuder was still alive thanks to Kishiar's intervention, it was thanks to Kanna and the other Cavalry members that he was able to rise and reach this point. Their efforts bought Yuder time to grasp his sword again and even converse with Kishiar.

Now, it was time for him to act, for them, and to execute the final move that Kishiar couldn't finish.

"…"

Emergency response methods, half-forgotten in his memory, began to naturally come to the forefront of his mind without conscious recall.

As he exhaled deeply and took a step forward, a thin wind power climbed his arm, tightly binding his frayed sleeve cuffs. The material, stiff as wooden splints, provided a makeshift support and would allow him to wield his sword for a short time.

When he took another step, the ground beneath him slightly writhed, solidifying the path ahead. It was a comical sight, solidifying just enough space to step on, but it would prevent him from sinking into the mire and stealthily create an opening.

Stepping on this makeshift bridge-like path, Yuder entered the range of Hosanna's power, and the hailstones whirled violently. He no longer had the strength to raise a shield against them, but one clear fact remained.

These hailstones were, after all, part of nature.

Even in his weakened state, they were ultimately gentle and yielding to Yuder.

An old memory surfaced unbidden during Kishiar's earlier attack. Even when he was utterly drained, fighting monsters, and had fallen into a river, that very river had gently carried the severely injured Yuder, laying him softly upon the land.

Even if the path ahead was obscured, as long as one held onto certain truths, moving forward would no longer be a difficult task.

Yuder gritted his teeth and ran on the solid path. As soon as he moved, the Cavalry's attack noticeably weakened. Realizing Yuder's intent to kill Hosanna, they had shifted their focus to supportive abilities, clearing the way for him.

Thanks to this, Yuder progressed without being hit by the hailstones, which seemed to avoid him miraculously. Amidst the immense shock as if his body would burst open at any moment, he began to hear Hosanna's murmuring mixed with the wind.

"…You wouldn't know, Young Master. Once, a long time ago… when you came to the Southern Lands… someone told you to find them… a place I knew… where I lived briefly as a child… a good place…"

"I… thought that person was your mother… I should have sent you there earlier… Even if I thought it wasn't your wish, I should have gone… Why am I always like this… foolish and regretful…"

"But still… there's still time… I… still have a use… it's not over yet…"

"…"

Yuder, who had been unwavering, hesitated momentarily upon hearing the last of Hosanna's murmurs.

'Still? What does he mean by still?'

At the end of Hosanna's path, Nahan's body lay in tranquil repose, as if untouched by the hailstorm's fury. Hosanna's raging power and the hail had miraculously spared the area around him.

The body appeared rigid, a blood-soaked form showing no sign of strength.

It seemed improbable that Nahan, having exerted his last energy in a rampage, was still alive.

Yet, Hosanna was desperately crawling towards him, not just to guard Nahan's side but with a clear objective, repeatedly muttering to himself.

"I will take you there… I can do it… I am able…"

Yuder then remembered that Hosanna had been muttering similar words right before his last attack failed.

'Could it be?'

Was Nahan still alive?

Yuder's mind spun rapidly amid the confusion, quickly revisiting past memories, searching for what he might have missed. The only thing he had confirmed himself was Nahan's lack of response after the Duke of Herne's death. He hadn't been able to check if Nahan was breathing up close due to Hosanna's sudden appearance.

Of course, the likelihood was higher that Hosanna was delirious and speaking nonsense.

But what if Nahan was still alive?

That damned ability of his. Wasn't it an infuriating illusion, optimized for deceiving the eyes, senses, and perception of others?

'Damn it.'

With a curse he couldn't remember how many times he had uttered that day, Yuder clenched his sword. The pain was suffocating, blinding him, but it didn't matter.

Hosanna was just a crawl away from reaching Nahan again.

If he continued like this, he wouldn't reach them before they made contact.

Drawing a deep breath, as if to expand his fractured chest, Yuder shouted loudly.

“Cavalry! Full assault!”

He resolved that regardless of what happened to him, he must send the signal for a simultaneous attack and hurled himself into the fray without reservation. Amidst the sensation of heavy hailstones, like stones, battering his entire body, he kept his eyes open, focused solely on the back of Hosanna’s head as he crawled determinedly across the ground.

Hosanna stretched out his unsevered, wound-covered hand.

Yuder pushed off the ground, leaping forward again.

Hosanna’s hand trembled as it neared Nahan’s body, almost touching it.

Yuder raised his sword high.

‘No, it’s too slow.’

In moments when his body refused to obey, there was always one thing he desperately wished to move - that part of him that had become more than just a limb, the power of an Awakener.

Although his strength was already spent, he knew there was still a fundamental seed within. In his veins, coursing through his belly, was the origin of the Red Stone’s power that he carried within - a force that must still be present.

He knew it was dangerous, but that power had always cleared the way whenever he needed it. That was all he could rely on now.

‘Please. Now!’

With a fervent cry, he widened his eyes and swung his sword.

Beneath the armor, invisible to the eye, the blood-red veins on the back of his hand surged momentarily, extending up his forearm, to his shoulder, neck, face, eyes, chest, and continuously unimpeded to his heart, finally reaching the empty mana hole deep within his abdomen.

Thump, thump, thump, thump.

A resistance as if questioning whether he could overcome this barrier, and an excruciating pain as if his entire body would burst.

Without hesitation, he chose to go beyond.

Whooaah!

A bright red flame traveled up his sword, melting all the hail in its path, and shot straight forward, piercing Hosanna mightily.

Gulping for air, Hosanna's hand, now sprawled on the ground, finally touched the hem of Nahan's garment.

Moments later, a massive explosion erupted from where Hosanna had been.

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Chapter 856

Moments later, a massive explosion erupted from where Hosanna had been.

It was no ordinary explosion. This was the aftermath of a cataclysmic release of energy, all the power that had been contained within the body of one person, one Awakener, bursting forth in an instant.

Yuder, who had been closest to the blast, was thrown violently by its shockwave. After tumbling a few times, he lay there, battered, as hailstones, now beyond his control, poured down upon him.

His ears rang, a persistent tinnitus echoing in his head. His vision flickered relentlessly, darkness encroaching. Despite the overwhelming pain, a fierce determination not to fall here drove him to weakly move his limbs.

After the hailstorm had finally ceased, Yuder, clutching his sword, used it to push himself up from the ground, staggering to his feet. He had to see with his own eyes what had just happened.

Taking deep breaths, he opened his eyes wide. Now, he could clearly see the landscape before him.

Where Hosanna had just been, a significant expanse of land was now cratered as if a giant boulder had struck it. The ground was covered in dark, blood-red stains.

A crimson earth, not a single hair to be found.

Yuder quickly realized what this meant.

His last attack had undoubtedly pierced Hosanna. But…

‘Hosanna must have managed to use his ability in the final moment.’

Had Hosanna fallen without a chance to use his ability under Yuder's attack, the aftermath would have been different. At least, the bodies of Hosanna and Nahan, the two foes, would have remained at the site of the attack.

But the utter lack of even a fragment of bone in this blasted landscape meant that Hosanna had managed to use his power at the last moment, causing his body to be torn apart instantly and completely.

Previously, his movements had not been his own will but more a result of being swept up in the overwhelming surge of power. However, this last act was different. Hosanna had clearly intended to use all his strength to send Nahan somewhere else. Thus, Yuder's prediction that Hosanna would explode and die the moment he used his ability had come to pass.

The most crucial evidence supporting this hypothesis was the absence of Nahan's body in the bloody crater. Even if swept away by the explosion, there should have been some trace of him, but there was nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

Yuder gazed into the empty pit, exhaling a trembling breath.

Despite his hopes not to be too late, he had failed to stop Hosanna effectively. The explosion hadn't been as powerful as it could have been, probably because he had almost simultaneously struck and cut off Hosanna's air supply, but everything else had gone beyond his expectations.

No, it wasn't just a deviation. It was almost akin to a failure.

Yuder couldn't be certain whether Nahan was truly dead. Not only that, but he also had no idea where Nahan's body might have been blown to. He had heard Hosanna mutter something about "Southern Lands," but could he really have sent someone else that far away, excluding himself? With some luck, the ability might not have fully activated at the last moment, and Nahan might be found near here. But if not…

The only certainty was that he had no capacity to immediately search and confirm this in the current situation.

Sighing heavily, Yuder exhaled a breath thick with the stench of blood. Gritting his teeth, he tightly gripped the handle of his sword, then relaxed his hold.

A wave of intense emptiness washed over him, but his emotions remained steady beyond that. He was all too familiar with desperate situations. In fact, the smooth progress up to now had been the anomaly for Yudrain Aile. Feelings of anger and frustration were far more familiar to him.

‘Anyway… The aftermath of the explosion was smaller than I expected. It must be due to the simultaneous release of Hosanna’s and my powers. At least it seems there were no casualties among us… Kishiar too.’

Kishiar. The thought that he needed to return to where Kishiar was only then occurred to him. Yuder attempted to turn around, but stopped as the Cavalry members rushed in, surrounding him.

“Yuder!”

Fortunately, there were no severely injured among them. Kanna, who had arrived first, scanned Yuder from head to toe with a pale face. The others, too, were shouting incomprehensibly, their gestures filled with shock and confusion.

“Your clothes…!”

“Your body!”

“Your face, your face…!”

Only then did Yuder realize that his limbs and clothes were soaked in a dark, blood-red liquid. It was the residue of Hosanna’s explosive demise.

Blood dripped from his clothes and hair, covering him from head to toe. Not all of it was his own, but to others, it must have looked horrific.

“Good heavens. Someone go and kidnap any priest…”

“It’s fine. I don’t need a priest… Start organizing the area and preparing for a search.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“…Hosanna, in his last moment, used his power to send Nahan somewhere. If we’re lucky, he’ll be nearby… but if not, we might never find him.”

The others seemed bewildered, not fully understanding Yuder’s words. But Kanna was different. She grasped the unsaid implications in Yuder’s brief statement.

“Do you think… Nahan might not be dead?”

“Maybe.”

“But Yuder, to me, it seemed like he was dead. Even considering Hosanna and Nahan’s extraordinary abilities, that’s…”

Unable to finish her thought, Kanna blinked her eyes tightly.

“No, I understand. It will become clearer once we gather more information. Alright, we’ll do it your way… Yuder?!”

“Yuder! Where are you going…!”

Yuder lacked the strength to respond to his comrades. Staggering, he shrugged off their attempts to help and turned away. His destination was, of course, where Kishiar was. Realizing Yuder’s intent, his comrades tried to follow and support him, but Yuder shook his head, refusing their help, and continued to walk alone.

He had worried that Kishiar might have been caught in Hosanna’s blast, but fortunately, Kishiar seemed to be unharmed from the explosion just now. Two Cavalry members were supporting him. The man who had been waiting where Yuder had told him to stay, now slowly approached. There was only one red eye, sunken so deeply that it looked pitch black, not two as usual.

Seeing the man, whose handsome face was half-covered in blood, standing with one eye closed, Yuder felt a sharp pang in his heart, and the sharp anger he had felt earlier surged anew.

How could this ever be called love?

The moment their faces met, Yuder felt an overwhelming sense of relief mixed with pain, anger, and an unbearable restlessness. All these emotions converged.

Looking at Kishiar's wounds, Yuder slowly opened his mouth.

"…In the end, I failed to make the right move. I'm sorry."

"…"

"I couldn't stop Hosanna by a narrow margin. It seems he might have sent Nahan somewhere in his final moment. A search… will be necessary."

"…"

"The explosion was smaller than expected, but there might soon be a reaction from the cracks. We need to hurry and join forces with Sir Zuckerman to prepare."

…

Kishiar's gaze drifted past Yuder's head, towards the sky. After a moment, he spoke.

"…The flame you released at the end."

"…"

"…Did you make a choice?"

The words were vague, yet Yuder understood what he meant. It was also clear that Kishiar, having witnessed Yuder using a power he should not have been able to in those final moments, knew as well.

As expected, even if he could deceive anyone else, he couldn’t deceive Kishiar’s eyes.

Yuder slowly nodded.

Kishiar closed his eyes.

From a distance, a rumbling sound began to echo.

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Chapter 857

From a distance, a rumbling sound began to echo.

“Ah…!”

“In this situation, even that damn sky…”

Two members of the Cavalry, supporting Kishiar, simultaneously looked up at the sky, spewing curses and sighs of despair.

Had the cracks already begun to react? He had anticipated that the cracks would open due to Hosanna’s death, but facing the reality of the situation made his heart feel unbearably heavy.

At the moment he had unavoidably faced the cracks, he realized that perhaps no method would have avoided this inevitable outcome. The regret of not being able to do better gnawed at him. But what could he do? At that time, he had made the best decision he could. Now, all he could do was accept what had happened and prepare for what was next.

Thoughts raced through his mind: the current state of his allies, the best strategic positioning, methods to persuade Kishiar to stay out of it, and plans to mitigate civilian casualties in the relentless weather.

Even with a throbbing headache, Yuder tirelessly and fiercely compared the situation to memories of his past life. This situation was unlike any he had experienced before. Yet, he believed that somewhere in his memories lay crucial information that could help.

‘From now on, nothing can be taken for granted. There’s no way to get through this without any harm to my allies. Still, it is paramount to minimize serious injuries and facilitate easier treatment… the impact around Charloin will be centered here…’

“Yuder.”

At that moment, Kishiar interrupted his train of thought. Yuder, reacting a bit slowly, lifted his head. Even though he was covered in blood and being supported, he still kept his back straight and breath steady, which was characteristic of him, and was so elegant that it made Yuder's heart ache.

He realized for the first time that this must be the pride Kishiar had ingrained in himself, never to be lost in any situation. A fleeting image of a man seated in the dark Peletta Castle crossed his mind, but this was not the time to dwell on that. He quickly dismissed the thought.

"Just now, you mentioned that you didn't make the last move correctly… But is that really the case?"

"…What do you mean?"

Yuder's response was delayed, his mind still clouded with unnecessary thoughts. Kishiar's gaze, though heavy, seemed to carry a different nuance from before, as if reading all of Yuder's thoughts. Yuder, feeling slightly overwhelmed, averted his gaze.

"To think of a response without fully understanding the outcome… Isn't it too early for that?"

Kishiar evidently knew what Yuder was pondering over. It wasn't a surprise, as Kishiar likely shared the same thoughts.

"What more is there to confirm here?"

"Over there."

Regulating his breath, Kishiar slowly lifted his index finger, pointing towards the sky. It seemed he desperately wanted Yuder to look in that direction. Halting his thoughts, Yuder followed the direction indicated by Kishiar's hand.

At first, all he saw was the dark sky and the hail that continued to fall, just as before. It took a moment for his blurred vision to focus, but eventually, he discerned the crack nestled amidst the chaos.

However,

‘What’s this?’

Something was different. The last time he checked, there had been three cracks. But now, somehow, two had vanished, leaving only one. Yuder blinked repeatedly, doubting his own eyes.

“…There were certainly three before?”

No matter how many times he looked, there was still only one crack. The remaining crack writhed, open-mouthed. The wriggling black shadows inside it sent shivers down the spine, triggering an instinctual sense of danger.

Yet, there was still only one crack. The difference this implied was significant. Yuder hurriedly turned his head back. Kishiar, whose gaze met his, faintly lifted the corners of his lips.

“…Did you see it?”

The situation perfectly matched the name.

Not all moves lead to victory. A move thought to be the best could give the enemy an opportunity, and sometimes, it could lead into a crisis.

However, if one can find something greater than just a finger and a wedding ring, then, and only then, does the ring on the ring finger truly gain meaning and life.

Yuder looked up again at the lone remaining crack. Although it seemed like a crisis with monsters about to pour out any moment, he didn’t feel the same as before.

That’s when he heard familiar voices nearby.

“Duke.”

“Yuder!”

“Your Highness!”

Unlike them, Nathan Zuckerman and Ever, still unscathed, appeared. Behind them were the rest of the Cavalry members, minus those with Kanna earlier, and General Gino leading the Imperial Special Forces, along with his adjutant.

Nathan Zuckerman, who approached faster than anyone else, alternated his gaze between Kishiar and Yuder. He seemed about to reproach Yuder for Kishiar’s injured state, despite Yuder’s presence, but he just furrowed his brow and said nothing.

It was absurd, but his hesitation seemed as if he couldn’t decide whom to support first. Yuder, quickly gesturing towards Kishiar, spoke up.

“The blood is not mine, and as you can see, I can stand on my own. Please attend to the Commander.”

“…I wasn’t going to say that, but alright.”

With a short sigh, Nathan Zuckerman turned to Kishiar. The two exchanged an indiscernible look for a moment.

“My God, Your Highness…”

Finally reaching them, General Gino swallowed hard, unable to continue. He was a mess, but still better off compared to the others.

Yuder took the opportunity to step back slightly as General Gino began speaking hurriedly to Kishiar. He thought standing was fine, but moving made him dizzy, almost causing his knees to buckle.

The hand that steadied him, amidst the pervasive smell of blood, carried a completely different scent.

Turning his head, Yuder’s blurry vision settled on a face all too familiar, one he never expected to see here.

“…”

“Good heavens… By God…”

It was Enon, and beside him, Lusan. When had they arrived?

Surrounded by the Cavalry members, Enon stood expressionless. His fierce gaze, so intense that even Yuder, who until moments ago was too enraged to think, flinched. His eyes slowly scanned Yuder’s entire body.

A moment later, Enon turned to the Cavalry members and asked,

“My eyes seem a bit off… The burst tomato cluster here, that’s not a person, is it?”

“…Enon.”

Yuder muttered, but Enon didn’t turn his head, instead staring demandingly at the Cavalry members for an answer. Referring to him as a burst tomato cluster was so ruthlessly candid that it was almost absurd, yet no one dared to contradict him, such was the intimidating aura emanating from his entire being.

“How strange. Where did the guy who was supposed to go to a funeral and got all dressed up go? And what on earth is this burst tomato mess? Are you telling me you brought me here to treat this?”

“It’s me, Enon.”

“Ha, ha. Damn. Do tomatoes talk these days?”

Even the pelting hail seemed to lose its force in front of Enon’s dry laughter, a notion that likely wasn’t exclusive to Yuder’s perception.

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Chapter 858

“There were… circumstances. I did get hurt, but it’s not that serious. Please, attend to the Commander first…”

“Not that serious? Who said that?”

Finally, Enon reacted to Yuder’s words and retorted.

“…”

“Huh? Who said it’s not serious? Are you a pharmacist? A doctor? Or even a priest?”

Eventually, Enon didn’t just grab Yuder’s arm but his collar as well.

“Do you really want me to show you what ‘serious’ looks like? Huh?! With you looking like this, you should be lying down pretending to be dead, not standing up and responding so clearly. Are you crazy enough to want to die?!”

His last shout was almost loud enough to shatter hailstones. Even Yuder Aile, the fearless recognized by Kishiar La Orr, knew that in this situation, it was best not to say more. This was beyond mere courage.

As Yuder was shaken by the collar in Enon’s grip, chaos erupted around them.

“Sir Enon! Sir Yuder is seriously injured! Calm down and prepare for his treatment immediately!”

“Yes, pharmacist! Please calm down! Yuder might die at this rate! He already looks half-dead! Seriously, he might die!”

“Damn it! Everyone, back off! I can’t let go because you’re crowding and pressing on us!”

To the others, Enon’s grip might have seemed rough, but in reality, it wasn’t painful. He was actually creating space, preventing others from carelessly bumping into Yuder. His rough exterior belied a familiarity with saving and protecting lives.

After the commotion, Enon finally released Yuder’s collar and exploded with frustration.

“You, no better than a spat-out tomato peel. If you don’t want to collapse and die, don’t move a step until I’m back and ready. Got it or not?”

“…”

“Look at you. Not answering, huh?!”

“It’s not me, but the Commander. He’s in worse condition. Please see to him first.”

“You still don’t get it, do you?!”

Yuder murmured so softly that only Enon could hear, moving just his lips. Enon’s hand went to his forehead, shaking. His fierce yellow eyes darted towards Kishiar, then he exhaled a breath filled with rage.

“Both of you…! If need be, I’ll handle it myself, so stop yapping and just lie down! What? You don’t want to? Really now! Then at least sit down! And don’t move from there!”

Enon’s urgency signified that any more activity might lead to a grave outcome. Though Yuder had felt suffocating pain until the power of the Red Stone broke through some barrier, making it easier to walk and talk, Enon’s reaction suggested otherwise.

But still, being likened to a spat-out tomato peel… Yuder couldn’t recall hearing a more belittling description of himself. It was even worse than the earlier ‘burst tomato’ comment.

‘No… they’re both tomatoes. Maybe there’s no difference after all.’

Amidst the severity of the situation, Yuder felt an inexplicable urge to smile, prompting Enon to contort his face like a demon.

“Finding this funny? While everyone else manages to keep themselves safe, why must you always sacrifice yourself like this?!”

Yuder felt compelled to object to that.

“That’s not true.”

“What?”

“I’ve never sacrificed myself. If I had been alone… it wouldn’t have ended like this.”

Enon seemed momentarily speechless, his eyebrows twitching. After a pause, he pressed his forehead and let out a deep sigh.

“Just be quiet for now. Stay put as if you’re dead until I return. Understood?”

Once Enon had ensured Yuder was seated, he left, still seething with anger, taking a few members of the Cavalry to assist him with Lusan. Only then did Kanna approach cautiously, accompanied by the weary Ever and Eldore siblings and other familiar comrades. Among them were Sunz and Emon, who had followed General Gino, all of them too shocked to even speak.

‘…This shouldn’t have been such a big deal. The crack is about to open. Even though it has reduced to just one, the situation is still…’

“Yuder, I know what you’re thinking. You’re worried about that crack that hasn’t disappeared yet, right?”

Kanna, kneeling close by, asked with a stern face.

“…”

In truth, Yuder had many other questions: whether the sage’s side had been properly dealt with, if they were prepared for the monsters that seemed

likely to emerge, whether anyone else had been injured in the meantime, how Gakane and Kurga, who had been carried away, were doing… But seeing Kanna's expression, he felt it might not be appropriate to ask.

"You'd say you haven't done enough yet, right? That's why you're pushing yourself beyond your limits. Because you don't think we're reliable enough."

"…That's not…"

Yuder shook his head, meaning to disagree, but Kanna's expression remained unchanged.

"No. You still don't trust us enough. That's the truth, and I won't deny it. If it weren't for you and the Commander, we wouldn't have been able to stay intact like this."

Kanna continued as if everyone there knew this already.

"The pharmacist is right. It's embarrassing and frustrating that among all of us here, only two are seriously injured, and those two are you and the Commander. I'm so angry I can't stand it. Everyone here feels the same. You know?"

Yuder was struck by Kanna's words, feeling a ripple of unfamiliar emotion.

"I won't ask you to trust us as much as the Commander right away. That would be like weak children begging for reliance. So, if you want to trust us, our job now is to rise and finish what you couldn't."

"…"

"Do we all agree?"

As Kanna slowly stood up, a ragged group of people, wet and wounded, unanimously responded with a mix of cold and fiery gazes.

"No need to ask that."

“It was obviously something we should have done.”

“Let’s go, hurry!”

“Yuder. See you later. After everything is over, I’ll definitely tell you at the branch that there’s nothing to worry about.”

Ever spoke softly, patting Yuder’s shoulder gently before withdrawing.

The companions turned and walked away. Yuder watched them leave for a long time before turning his head. Nathan Zuckerman and General Gino had disappeared at some point, and Kishiar stood alone, watching him.

“…Haven’t you left yet?”

“I can’t leave you behind.”

His voice and demeanor seemed somewhat improved from earlier, but Yuder noticed something unfamiliar in Kishiar’s hand. Upon closer inspection, it was a purification stone.

‘Nathan Zuckerman… was he the one who gave this?’

The ability to wield divine power would be greatly enhanced with a purification stone. The presence of a capable adjutant indeed made a world of difference, bringing much-needed relief.

‘But… what does it mean that he didn’t go because of me?’ A little later, as he frowned slightly, blinking blankly, a realization dawned belatedly.

Kishiar chuckled softly, “Truth be told, I’m all too familiar with situations where I wish to go out but can’t. Nathan was nurtured for such occasions, like the Cavalry isn’t he?”

Silence followed.

“Sometimes, when I cannot take direct action, I must learn to trust others. Right now, what’s most crucial isn’t to persist forcibly but to step back and prepare for the next move.”

Slowly approaching, Kishiar sat down beside Yuder, undisturbed by the filthy, muddy ground.

“My beloved still doesn’t quite understand what that is. So… I chose to stay here.”

Beside someone who needs me the most, and whom I need the most.

Kishiar murmured, extending his hand to gently wrap around Yuder’s shoulder without causing pain.

Their wounded bodies leaned against each other for support, shoulder to shoulder. Although Yuder couldn’t fully grasp the meaning of Kishiar’s words in his heart, he strangely felt his mind growing increasingly dull.

His body, once frozen stiff, began to relax. The blood, which had stopped flowing, seemed to start coursing through his veins once again, reawakening the pain he thought had subsided.

“Ah…”

So, it wasn’t that he had gotten better; in reality, he had merely blocked out the sensation forcibly.

The numbness to pain in his body was rarely overwhelmed by such agony. Yet, this pain felt somewhat different from the torture he had experienced in the illusion.

Perhaps it was due to the warmth of the only person who chose to sit by his side even in this state.

The rage that had been boiling inside him finally extinguished completely. The gaping holes within him, too, slowly closed their mouths, quieting down.

Yuder, blinking sleepily, alternated between closing and opening his eyes. Finally, he stopped resisting the onslaught of sensations and surrendered his body entirely.

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Chapter 859

Kishiar finally lowered his head and gazed down at Yuder, who lay with his eyes closed in utter defeat. It was a ghastly sight. In the moment of Hosanna's explosion, Yuder was covered in blood, his hair and body stained entirely red, his limbs twisted and torn beyond recognition.

But the most horrifying aspect was the new dark veins starkly visible against his blood-soaked skin. Darker than deep red, almost black, they spread like creeping vines across his face, body, even his tongue and eyes, leaving no part untouched. One could only guess the extent of their spread by removing his clothes, but the visible parts alone were enough to suggest a profound disturbance.

No one dared to respond to the pharmacist's comparison of him to a burst tomato. Just looking at Yuder's state, it was undeniable that he had pushed himself to breaking until he nearly shattered.

Kishiar noticed Yuder's arms, limp and exposed from his sleeves, as he fainted. Swollen unnaturally, the sight stirred a fresh wave of shock in Kishiar's heart, already beyond surprise.

Who among those who had seen Yuder wield his sword earlier could believe that his arms were in such a condition? Even Kishiar himself hadn't realized the extent of the damage at first.

Yuder's unbelievable appearance, seemingly unscathed and upright till the last, his voice steady and his head held high despite being utterly crushed, was something to behold.

Kishiar closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He couldn't tell if he was smiling or what expression he bore. He had long surpassed the physical limits of endurance.

Receiving the purification stone from Nathan, used only in the direst moments, allowed him to absorb some divine power and keep his eyes

open, but that was all. One eye, clogged with blood, was completely unable to see, and the other was immensely blurred. His overstrained spirit, entangled energies, screamed in agony, causing his vision to flicker into darkness repeatedly before returning.

Yet, until Yuder could accept his condition, Kishiar knew he must not fall apart in front of him. Despite his slow thoughts and foggy mind, he was there beside him. His vessel, for now, remained intact.

‘…It’s been a long time since I’ve felt this,’ Kishiar mused.

Had he ever taken such a forefront role before?

‘No.’

He had never exerted himself to this extent.

‘Not at all.’

Kishiar La Orr was more familiar with the world beyond the board, overseeing all strategies at a glance. He was accustomed to sitting in the corners of the imperial palace, inside the walls of Peletta Castle, within the Cavalry, observing and maneuvering the game.

Yet he always wished that someday he would descend onto the board and move freely. When he recently had the chance to exert his strength as he desired, he experienced a longed-for sense of liberation and thrill.

But what about now?

“…”

Kishiar was confronted for the first time with the gap between what he had only theorized in his mind and the reality of facing these things firsthand. The difference between anticipating the harm in attacks among others and witnessing a loved one bear the brunt of an attack he had launched was immeasurable by any prediction or number.

However, in stark contrast to Kishiar, Yuder moved with a calm familiarity as the situation grew more dire. He stood like a lone flag planted firmly amidst a battlefield riddled with failures and flaws.

His demeanor exceeded everything Kishiar thought he knew. Yuder's face, too familiar with despair, anger, the smell of blood and metal. Swallowing the emptiness faster than anyone, his black eyes, cold and emotionless, made him seem more like the battlefield itself.

It was a sight both awe-inspiring and painful.

Focused solely on his goal, excluding everything else.

This must have been Yuder in the 'previous game'.

Back then, Yuder appeared almost deaf to the world around him, engulfed in the compulsion to resolve the remaining cracks, barely acknowledging even Kishiar's words. Even the familiar Cavalry members were genuinely frightened by this state.

The arrival of Yuder's especially cherished and loved comrades was timely. Kishiar tactfully stepped back, allowing them to talk to Yuder without minding him. He wanted to encase and protect the wounded Yuder in his own voice and touch, but he knew sometimes more effective methods lay outside his own.

The pharmacist, who cherished Yuder like a chick he had personally raised, Kanna, who could read the unspoken with ease, and the members who never retreated regardless of Yuder's state, helped Yuder slowly return to his normal self.

Observing from a distance, Kishiar also found a moment to assume a semblance of normalcy, issuing orders to Nathan Zuckerman and Gino, and receiving the purification stone.

Nathan Zuckerman, while handing over the purification stone, struggled to understand Kishiar's intentions.

“…How can you endure any longer here? Please reconsider. Your Highness needs immediate treatment.”

Kishiar shook his head.

“Why…”

“What I need now is not healing, Nathan. You might not believe it, but I don’t think I’ll die today. There’s something more important than that here. So for now… I need to be here.”

Yuder was still standing, not yet completely reassured. Thus, Kishiar too had to remain.

Even if they no longer had the strength to protect each other, they knew through an innate understanding that this was a moment they both needed.

And as a result, Yuder was finally in his arms, his eyes fully closed, no longer able to worry about what followed.

“…”

Kishiar hugged Yuder a bit tighter, a bit deeper, breathing out. The heat radiating from Yuder in his embrace was intense, almost melting the hail that fell around them. Kishiar gently wiped the droplets rolling down Yuder’s cheek, softly pressing his forehead to Yuder’s.

This was all he could do now.

‘And one more thing…’

Watching over the brilliant light that Yuder and he had prepared, overcoming the darkness.

High above in the distant sky, monsters began to emerge through the crack that had started to open. Unlike the giant one that had appeared over the southern branch before, these creatures were small and clustered together, black as night, resembling swarms of insects or clumps of dust.

“–!”

Flames burst towards the sky, piercing through the darkness and the weather. The people’s cries echoed through the tumult.

And amidst this chaos, Kishiar faintly smiled as he spotted Enon and Lusan rushing towards the scene, undeterred by the commotion.

“All of them are the fruits of your efforts. Even I am a part of it…”

It was strange. Despite the perilous, unpredictable situation, there was an unshakable feeling that they wouldn’t lose.

What would Yuder say if Kishiar shared this thought with him? Kishiar pondered this unanswerable question for a moment before dismissing it.

“Emon! Three behind you!”

“Got it!”

Sunz and Emon faced each other, fighting deftly with their powers. Unlike before, they didn’t seem terribly frightened by the monsters. It wasn’t that they were completely fearless, but rather it felt as if fear itself had been lost, leaving them devoid of any sensation of it.

And it made sense…

“Kill them! Just kill them all!”

“If you can’t handle even that, get out of the Cavalry! Hand in your badges, you cowards!”

How could they be afraid when members of the Cavalry were rampaging around them, more ferociously than any monster, as if driven mad?

The Cavalry fought with a ferocity as if they were immune to pain. When monsters attacked, they didn’t flinch or protect themselves; instead, some would willingly offer an arm, luring the creatures in for the kill.

In this almost demonic fervor, Sunz recalled the unbelievable sight of Yuder Aile he had witnessed earlier, as if a phantom from a distant memory. The ferocity and resolve in Yuder's eyes, the unwavering spirit amidst chaos and destruction, echoed in the actions of the Cavalry members. Their relentless assault, devoid of fear, mirrored that of Yuder's indomitable presence on the battlefield.

The sight was as inspiring as it was terrifying. The Cavalry members, once mere soldiers, now fought with a grim determination that transcended ordinary human limits. Each one seemed to embody the same relentless spirit that Yuder Aile had shown, a testament to the influence of his unyielding will and the legacy he had created within the ranks.

In this maelstrom of violence and valor, Kishiar, Sunz, Emon, and the rest of the Cavalry members stood as the last line of defense against the monstrous onslaught, their courage a beacon of hope amidst the encroaching darkness.

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Chapter 860

In the demon-like visage before him, Sunz recalled the appearance of Yuder Aile, which he had seen with his own eyes yet found hard to believe.

Covered in blood, Yuder stood as something far beyond the comprehension of an ordinary human. How could a person not fall, not cry out in pain, or even remain unflinching in such a state?

The sight was shocking and terrifying, yet they all felt a frustrating inability to explain their feelings. The nature of these emotions was clearly articulated by Kanna.

Everyone here feels ashamed and infuriated.

Yes, that was true. Sunz and Emon felt ashamed. They thought they had fought hard, but in retrospect, they had merely hidden behind the Cavalry and taken the easy tasks.

Had they, since awakening their powers, ever fought with all their might like Yuder Aile, even once, risking their own bodies to the brink of destruction? Had they ever volunteered for the more dangerous and arduous tasks, leaving the easier ones to others? Had they sincerely considered that those in higher positions should bear more responsibility and shed more blood?

They had not. Not even once.

They only realized this fact after seeing the battered Yuder and the Cavalry Commander standing beside him. Their clean clothes unstained by blood, their unharmed limbs, and lives spared by others' sacrifices… it was unbearably shameful.

Who was Yuder Aile again? The benefactor who showed the way forward for them who lived each day in mundane misery, unable to die. He had

taught them not to underestimate their powers and had treated their promotions as deserved, without jealousy or caution.

Yet, even in his dire state, Yuder Aile had made unbelievable efforts to resolve the cracks and monsters. Disappointed in themselves for almost retreating in fear at his mere appearance, Sunz and Emon fought harder than ever. Although still less crazed than the Cavalry members around them, their shame grew as their fear seemed to numb away. They unleashed emotions they didn't even know had been building up, finding strength in their outburst.

"What are you doing! I won't let anyone retreat even a step!"

"Open your eyes! You are proud members of the Empire's Special Forces! This is your duty!"

The Special Forces, who had joined the Cavalry from the southern branch, were initially startled by the shouts of their Captain, but soon they too roared fiercely.

"Aaaah!"

Initially, when the unit had just formed and trained a few times, they were apprehensive, unsure of how far and how to use their abilities, especially since most of the other Imperial forces were non-Awakeners and they were conscious of their gaze.

But today was different. Influenced by the Cavalry, the Special Forces no longer hesitated to use their powers when needed.

"I can hardly believe this isn't a dream but reality."

"Indeed, General."

General Gino, holding his sword, shook his head in disbelief. His adjutant, Meghna, usually composed, was half-lost in shock. In their view, groups of Cavalry members and Empire soldiers in uniform, without distinction, were throwing themselves into battle, unleashing their abilities.

Fire and water surged, and all sorts of dazzling powers, barely visible to the eye, targeted the enemy. Some transformed their bodies into stone in an instant, while others wielded parts of their altered forms instead of swords to strike down monsters.

Light burst forth, and then pitch-black darkness engulfed the monsters. Arrows, formless yet precise, pierced their vital spots. The wind gathered hail into a small storm, and winged beings flew above, capturing and hurling monsters into it.

As a child, lying in bed, he had heard tales from the adults about the magic era a thousand years ago. Watching these incredible powers being wielded effortlessly by human bodies, he found it hard to believe.

Even though he himself was a swordmaster capable of wielding aura, he was still amazed.

Watching this surreal and unfamiliar scene, the old general chuckled softly.

“When I first heard Duke Peletta’s words and saw this horde of monsters, I thought my old body would finally meet its end here… but seeing this, I’m ashamed to have thought so.”

His life had been lived steadfastly guarding the Empire’s heartland, which made certain things clear.

The nobles grew increasingly obsessed with their own gain, uncaring for the nation or its people, who were exhausted and dying from exploitation, dreaming of escape.

The imperial family, powerless, floundered without achieving meaningful results, while the few righteous individuals were overwhelmed by merely maintaining their positions.

General Gino had thought perhaps there was no hope left for this empire. Was it just the empire? Everywhere he looked, the world seemed the same: decaying, with new things being suppressed and any sprouts of hope

trampled before they could grow. Powerful mages dwindled, and despite diligent training, no new swordmasters emerged.

There were times he felt everyone might have given up, caring only for their own lives as accumulated frustration and helplessness turned their interest away from the world, desiring only to detach from everything but themselves.

Yet, the old general persisted, ashamed to show the children born into this world a more broken and fallen state than it already was. Holding his position, he did all he could to teach his successors, knowing nothing but the sword. That was his way.

But did he truly believe the world would improve? No, he was content if it could just maintain its current state…

Clutching his age-old beloved sword, the general felt its aura, brighter than it had been in a long time, illuminating the blade in a vivid blue light.

The last request Kishiar had made came to mind.

“General. There’s no need to exert yourself commanding the Cavalry. Let them act freely, and you, for today, I hope you show yourself as the empire’s greatest swordsman. Is it too much to ask?”

The young duke, pale and bloodied, had spoken those words with feigned calmness. Gino always vividly remembered the beautiful young man from his childhood. He was one of the most painfully promising, yet destined to be broken and lost.

Always burdened with guilt for not having helped someone who was virtually expelled from the palace, General Gino had rejoiced immensely upon learning that this person had blossomed in a place where no one could protect him and had returned.

How could he possibly refuse such a person’s request?

Taking a deep breath, General Gino raised his sword, while Meghna bit her lip and followed closely at his side.

“General… please be careful.”

“Of course.”

Initially, Meghna had tried to dissuade General Gino from fighting himself instead of commanding.

Her opinion was that they should wait for more reinforcements, including Galexentre and the Special Brigades, who were yet unseen.

But how could they ignore those already battling while waiting for the others to arrive? The Special Forces soldiers mixed in the fray were also under General Gino’s command and responsibility.

General Gino smiled at his devoted disciple, who had strived for so long to meet his expectations. Meghna was someone who had given up much due to the pressure of succeeding her master as a swordmaster.

Yet, the general knew her real talent lay more in command than in swordsmanship. Perhaps he could teach her today that she had qualities surpassing even those of her master, who was more confident in swordsmanship than in command.

“I’ll be back, Meghna. I leave the rest to you.”

As the old general walked, not ran, his sword shimmered with aura. Moments later, a group of monsters charging at him was cleanly bisected by his controlled yet breathtakingly powerful aura.

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Chapter 861

General Gino’s aura was not particularly strong among the legendary swordmasters of history. In fact, his sword mark on the wall of sword marks in the capital was noticeably shorter compared to the one left by the First Emperor, and its power was not as profound as those of other swordmasters recorded in history.

Yet, the reason he was called the most respected swordmaster on the continent was not just due to his incorruptible nature and the upright life he led as proof of it.

Gino Bordelli, born into a humble noble family in his youth, lived a life of constant wandering until he reached middle age and became a swordmaster. Despite his noble status, he sought a life closer to the common folk, learning the sword wherever he could. His sword, honed and perfected through this journey, was said to embody the greatest freedom and restraint of the continent.

He was a swordmaster who could slice an apple into six pieces with his aura alone, an almost miraculous feat given its difficulty and complexity. His technique was unbound by convention, supported by immense perseverance and delicate finesse.

That was Gino Bordelli.

Though he had not engaged in combat for a long time, his experience never rusted. General Gino’s sword maintained its own pace, never acting rashly. Unlike young Awakeners who were not yet accustomed to their abilities and often got swept up in the excitement of battle, he was different.

Instead of leading the charge against monsters, he focused on helping Awakeners who were in danger during fights. Many who disregarded their own safety were spared severe injuries thanks to the General’s efforts.

“Be cautious. There are still many foes to face. It would be a pity to withdraw now due to an early injury.”

With just his presence and a sword in hand, he inspired respect effortlessly.

Those who witnessed him naturally calmed their excessive excitement and, as if by a silent agreement, followed him. The atmosphere, once like a raging herd of buffalo, softened. United in a single purpose, they resembled a finely honed sword.

The empire’s greatest swordsman thus began to fulfill the role Kishiar had entrusted to him, step by step.

“So it is General Gino himself. My presence here is no longer needed.”

“Eh? Ah, you are…”

Meghna, who had been gathering the injured and non-Awakeners left behind while watching his revered master’s back, turned in surprise at the unexpected low voice. Nathan Zuckerman, whose arrival had gone unnoticed, was staring expressionlessly towards where General Gino was.

Neither General Gino nor Meghna expected to see him again so soon, as he had vanished in the opposite direction the moment he arrived.

All Meghna knew about Nathan was that he was a former servant of Duke Peletta turned knight and, surprisingly, another swordmaster. Having never witnessed it herself despite her master’s recognition, she harbored some doubts. But not realizing his approach until he spoke right beside her…

‘It’s true.’

Even though she was not yet a swordaster, Meghna Kurlieva was one of the empire’s finest swordsmen, ranking among the top ten. To completely deceive the senses of a knight of her caliber was something she had only ever experienced with her master.

Therefore, this knight, who had lived quietly in service without gaining any fame, truly possessed skills on par with Gino Bordelli.

“Has Sir Zuckerman cleared the area where he was assigned?” Meghna asked cautiously.

Nathan Zuckerman, his expression unchanging, replied, “Yes. I prioritized handling the monsters approaching the area where the non-Awakeners were gathered. Now, I plan to observe the situation from a higher vantage point and then address the most dangerous areas first.”

The task seemed perilous to undertake alone. However, when Nathan Zuckerman spoke of it, it sounded as simple and natural as listing household chores.

Meghna wondered, does becoming a swordmaster relieve one of all tension? She swallowed her doubts and nodded in agreement.

“Understood. I’ll relay that to the General if he inquires. Please signal if you require assistance from our side. Though, as a swordmaster, you might not feel the need for it,” she said.

“I don’t think so,” Nathan unexpectedly replied, addressing Meghna’s concern that her words might have offended a swordmaster’s pride.

“I alone cannot fend off all those monsters. I would gladly welcome cooperation from Adjutant Kurlieva.”

“Oh, is that so? Then, that’s good to hear,” Meghna replied awkwardly.

As Nathan, seemingly about to turn away with his sword, paused his step, he looked at Meghna with an indecipherable gaze before speaking.

“Duke Peletta, my lord, always said that the hands of many ordinary people are much stronger than the power of one great individual. Even the most extraordinary swordmaster is still bound by human limitations and can never be absolute.”

There was a moment of silence.

“I prefer to be known not as a swordmaster, but as a knight serving my lord. I hope you can see me that way,” Nathan said before swiftly leaping away.

Meghna watched the direction he disappeared into, lost in thought for a long time.

A knight serving his lord, not a swordmaster. His words somehow awakened a long-forgotten sense of her own name and existence.

‘Is that so? I’m not a swordsman aspiring to be a swordmaster, but an adjutant serving the General, currently responsible for commanding and safeguarding this place in his stead.’

“Adjutant Kurlieva!”

Just then, someone urgently called out to Meghna. She quickly turned and ran towards the voice. Now, her eyes, adeptly commanding with her hand, no longer followed her master’s path.

“Ugh… Ugh… What on earth is this…”

Meanwhile, Kiolle struggled with the Crown Prince in his arms, his face twisted in distress from the fiercely pounding hail. With each step, the sensation of his feet sinking into the mud was dreadful.

“It hurts… It’s cold… It smells… Disgusting…”

Until recently, the barrier erected by Yuder that trapped Kiolle and the Crown Prince had been incredibly robust. Regardless of the loud noises outside or the falling debris, the wall had resiliently repelled everything. Its sudden disappearance coincided with an enormous sound and the inexplicable crack in the pitch-black sky.

Kiolle was at a loss, floundering in confusion. Initially, he had expected Yuder to appear soon, but no matter how long he waited, he did not show. With the hail coming down so fiercely, he couldn’t just leave the Crown Prince lying there; his only option was to carry him to safety.

Kiolle draped his coat over the Crown Prince’s head and carried him on his back. Despite appearing young and frail, the Crown Prince, being in his late

teens, was not light. His steps were slow and tense, wary of the unknown dangers that might appear at any moment.

Kiolle, fighting back hot tears, fervently cursed Yuder Aile.

“That damned monster… Promising an unbreakable barrier until his return, and then just leaving us like this… Is he telling me to just fend for myself now?”

As if responding to his curses, a hail of ice struck Kiolle’s forehead three times in quick succession, then bounced off his back, hitting the Crown Prince as well.

Kiolle, blinded by the sudden pain, screamed. He jolted at a groan from behind.

“Uh… Where is this…”

“Your Highness, Crown Prince? Are you conscious?”

“…Knight Kiolle?”

Finally, Crown Prince Katchian regained his senses. Opening his eyes, he blinked for a long time, struggling to grasp reality. He only frowned when another hailstone struck his shoulder.

“Where exactly are we? I remember… I was going to help the sage, but… where is this dreadful place? When did you come and bring me here?”

Kiolle quickly answered, ensuring the Crown Prince would not suspect him.

“We are still in the temple, Your Highness! I was so shocked when I heard that rioters had appeared.”

He told him that he had found him unconscious after being attacked and had been hiding with him. Kiolle conveniently left out his encounters with the Star of Nagran and Yuder Aile, embellishing his own efforts in the story.

However, the Crown Prince grew angry before Kiolle could finish his explanation.

“What? Then what about the sage! You mean to say you brought me here without even checking on the sage?”

“Your Highness, this is not the time for that. We need to escape to a safe place as quickly as possible!”

“Be quiet. Who asked for your opinion?”

Fire flashed across Kiolle’s cheeks at his rebuke. The Crown Prince, fuming, shook the hand he had slapped against his cheek.

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Chapter 862

Fire flashed across Kiolle's cheeks at his rebuke. The Crown Prince, fuming, shook the hand he had slapped against his cheek.

"Did you dare take advantage of my distraction to act recklessly? I never told you that you could behave as you please. If your intention was to protect me, you should have withdrawn from danger long ago. What then is your true purpose in still being here?"

"…"

"If you thought I would be easily deceived by such an explanation, you are gravely mistaken. Put me down immediately!"

Kiolle's cheek burned hot. The inside of his cheek felt as though it was pressed hard enough to burst, a metallic taste of blood lingering. The pain surged intensely right after. Staring blankly at the Crown Prince's face, which was glaring at him as he slid down his back, Kiolle was in shock.

One single thought dominated Kiolle's mind, overwhelmed by the abrupt shock.

'…I was slapped? Me? Now?…'

Throughout his life, he had often been scolded by his father. He had also been subtly insulted by his brothers. The flattery of those who would fabricate rumors and slander him behind his back was innumerable. Yet, none had ever raised a hand to Kiolle in such a manner.

The shock of his efforts to save the Crown Prince today being disregarded in an instant was staggering. However, what rendered Kiolle more stunned was the fact that the Crown Prince had dared to raise his hand to him, as if treating him like a foolish, incompetent servant.

Kiolle da Diarca was the youngest son, untouchable by anyone. A single wrong touch could lead to kneeling in apology for insulting the Diarca, and a minor injury could cost a life. So much so, that even knights hesitated to spar with him, leaving Kiolle to practice alone for over a year.

…Of course, there was the exception of Yuder Aile. Even that brute never dared to insult Kiolle's cheek in such a manner. That monster was always equally obnoxious to everyone except his master, Duke Peletta. He even had the audacity to spout insolence in front of Duke Diarca himself. Such an extraordinary individual couldn't be compared to the current situation.

Even when the Crown Prince acted like he had caught Kiolle's weakness, doing as he pleased, Kiolle suppressed his response.

He didn't want to fail the task his father had finally entrusted him with. After all, the Crown Prince was a member of the Diarca family. He believed the excessive behavior was due to the influence of the charlatans…

But this was different.

"…"

"Aren't you going to respond?"

The Crown Prince, who continued to rant, raised his hand again. This time, Kiolle did not let himself be hit, instead catching the wrist of the Crown Prince.

"How dare you! Let go!"

"…It seems, Your Highness, you are overly agitated because of that swindler. Let's return… If you dislike being carried, I will support you."

Despite his wounded pride, Kiolle forcefully swallowed his anger and restrained his temper, his eyes darkening as he coldly stared at the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince, initially startled, soon raged even more fiercely as if his earlier retreat never happened.

"What?! Who are you calling a swindler…! Let go! Release me!"

Kiolle no longer entertained the Crown Prince's tantrums. As he began to walk, holding onto him, the Crown Prince stumbled on the muddy ground.

"Dare you treat me in such a manner and think you will remain unharmed! Are you not afraid of your secrets being exposed to the world?"

Secrets? What of them? They weren't even true. Kiolle let the Crown Prince's words go in one ear and out the other as he continued on. He felt the Crown Prince's hand, which he had grabbed in a shout, beating against him, but perhaps due to the numbness of his insulted pride, it didn't hurt much.

Compared to what Yuder Aile had done to him, the young Crown Prince's punches, who didn't even wield a sword, felt less threatening than a minor cat's attack. After all, Kiolle was a knight, even if he hadn't produced a single fragment of aura at his age.

What he hadn't anticipated was the extent of the Crown Prince's current madness.

"…Agh!"

The dragged Crown Prince finally bit Kiolle's hand. Kiolle grimaced and flung his arm as if it had been burned, and the Crown Prince glared at him with bloodied lips.

Seeing those lips stained with his blood, Kiolle felt his rationality snap in half.

"What do you expect me to do?! Will you stay here in this dangerous place, getting pelted with hail for the rest of your life? Have you forgotten that your identity must not be discovered?!"

"Kneel."

…What? Kiolle blinked in disbelief as the Crown Prince commanded once more, almost in a fit.

“Kneel! Can’t you hear? Kneel before me right now, confess your sins for ruining everything, and beg for forgiveness! If you don’t, I won’t move an inch from here.”

“…”

“Dare you ignore me? Did the Duke Diarca tell you to do this?! Are you saying I should trust my life to a dog who doesn’t know who holds the upper hand between us?”

“A dog, you say, now?”

For the first time in his life, Kiolle da Diarca felt dizzy because of someone else. If this boy wasn’t the Crown Prince, he would have spat and turned away, but unfortunately, he was.

Kiolle’s already short patience had run out. His hand hurt, his head and body ached from the hail, his wet body was cold, and his head throbbed with overwhelming anger. Everything was so dreadful that tears seemed imminent.

‘Why… why do I have to do this here? Why!’

He had made a mistake. He should have turned his horse around and headed back to the capital as soon as he knew the Crown Prince had escaped and boarded his carriage. Then, even if he faced his father’s wrath, he wouldn’t have suffered this humiliation.

Perhaps kneeling would appease the mad Crown Prince enough to return. But Kiolle simply couldn’t bring himself to do it. As he trembled with suppressed rage and sorrow, the Crown Prince, who had been glaring at him, stepped closer and lifted his leg.

“Did you think I wouldn’t know? You believe you are above me. If you’re unwilling to bend those precious knees, then I’ll have to assist you.”

The Crown Prince kicked. Kiolle uttered a groan, stepping back. For the first time, a satisfied smile appeared on the Crown Prince’s lips. His face

was hauntingly beautiful, yet that smile made him look all the more devilish.

In that moment, Kiolle realized something. Katchian La Orr, the Crown Prince, was genuinely delighted by the sight of others in distress and pain due to him. It wasn't because of brainwashing. Kiolle had seen that look in the eyes of many nobles before. Such people, usually, were always like that by nature.

To the Crown Prince, witnessing Kiolle kneel and ultimately submit to him was more important than the current danger they faced.

The Crown Prince kicked Kiolle two, three times continuously. It was clear he intended to keep kicking until Kiolle finally knelt.

Thump, thump, thump. It wasn't painful, but amid such utterly degrading violence, Kiolle hesitated, unsure of what to do. Then, suddenly, numerous presences were felt from somewhere. Someone, seemingly a woman from a distance, clapped her hands and shouted, though her identity was indiscernible due to the hail and darkness.

"Is there someone there?!"

Even the Crown Prince, who had been kicking Kiolle, paused briefly at the voice.

"Why are you still here? Run away immediately! There are monsters! If you're lost, come this way…!"

"Mo… monsters?"

As if a fight amongst the Awakeners wasn't madness enough, now monsters had appeared? In the middle of such a vast sacred area? Kiolle mumbled with a dazed expression before abruptly turning his head.

"Your Highness. We must flee!"

"Why would monsters appear in the temple all of a sudden?"

“I don’t know either! But everyone else is running, aren’t they! We must go! This weather was already ominous. Let’s not waste any more time talking…!”

Just then, the Crown Prince slapped Kiolle’s cheek again.

“Nonsense?”

“…”

“You expect me to believe without a single clear explanation? You might be in league with those people for all I know. I no longer trust you. Step back! I will return after finding the sage!”

“This…”

It was so absurd that Kiolle nearly burst into tears. He was about to clench his teeth and shout something when suddenly…

Crack!

With a sound like a fruit being crushed by a stone, the Crown Prince fell forward, face first into the mud. A particularly large and solid hailstone rolled away behind him.

“…”

As Kiolle gazed blankly at the hailstone and then looked up, a woman in black mourning clothes with her long hair twisted up appeared.

Kiolle recognized her.

“…Herne, the First Princess…”

“Sir Diarca. What on earth are you doing here?”

Myra, with a face tired and weary, asked.

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Chapter 863

Kiolle stood silently, unable to continue speaking, as someone approached Myra's side and picked up a bloodstained hailstone that had rolled to the ground. The newcomer was dressed in a black uniform with brown, short hair and a small stature. Kiolle recognized her face as somewhat familiar and tried to remember where he had seen her before.

'I think I saw her at the party… The Cavalry…… one of the Deputy Commanders, perhaps…?'

He couldn't recall her name. If he couldn't remember the name of a servant he had been with for ten years, how could he be expected to remember the names of the numerous members of the Cavalry stationed behind Yudrain Aile? Nevertheless, it seemed clear that it wasn't Myra, the First Princess, who had thrown the hailstone, but a member of the Cavalry.

Despite her unassuming appearance, she had managed to aim perfectly at the back of someone's head in this dark, stormy weather. Although it seemed unbelievable, knowing that she was a member of the Cavalry made it less surprising.

Kiolle, still dazed, was glanced at by the Cavalry member, Kanna, who held Myra and spoke calmly.

"First Princess, please refrain from impulsive actions. This time it was a person, but it could have been a monster."

"I'm sorry. I just reacted without thinking when I heard something, it made sense then…"

"Haah… It does seem like you were right. It wasn't a monster, but still…"

Both of them exuded a familiar yet strange odor. Kiolle then realized that both Myra and Kanna were stained with blood on their skin and clothing.

‘…Blood… it’s blood…!’

“So, Sir Diarca, why are you still here and not fleeing? And that person looks like your servant, why were you getting beaten?”

Startled by Myra’s words, Kiolle momentarily forgot his shock at the smell of blood.

“How could I know…”

“That servant, he has noticeable blond hair. It’s strange to not remember someone you’re trying to hide while parading him around as your servant.”

“That’s… uh… ah…”

Kiolle’s mind momentarily stopped. Throughout their time living in the same mansion due to Duke Herne’s affairs, they had frequently seen each other. Moreover, Kiolle had engaged in strange behavior to hide the Crown Prince, so it was odd that Myra wouldn’t remember.

Kiolle had never imagined that someone like Myra would take any interest in a servant or commoner. For her, who had just barely recovered from witnessing her father’s horrific death, their presence was not of much concern. Kiolle didn’t know this.

“That’s, well…”

“But about this servant, are you just going to leave him like that? His face is buried in the mud, he might not be breathing.”

“Oh… Ahhh!”

Kiolle then hurriedly pulled Katchian’s head out of the muddy ground. The boy was a mess. His head, hit by the hailstone, was swollen and bleeding, and his face and clothes, buried in the mud, were so dirty that even Duke Diarca wouldn’t have recognized him as the Crown Prince.

“…”

Normally, Kiolle would have been fussing over cleaning the dirt off the face and checking the condition, but at that moment, all he felt was a complex emotion. The sight of Katchian's dirtied face brought back memories of the look in his eyes and his words when he had kicked and tried to make Kiolle kneel earlier.

"Should I help you carry him?"

"Uh? Oh…"

Kiolle's response was hesitant and uncertain, his mind still wrestling with the tangled memories and the reality in front of him. The events of the night had taken an unexpected turn, leaving Kiolle to grapple with a mix of surprise, concern, and an unspoken realization about the complexities of their intertwined lives.

At that moment, Kanna approached expressionlessly and asked, "This person…"

"Is there a problem?"

"No, it's nothing. Monsters might be approaching, so we should hurry. Everyone is waiting."

Myra turned her head towards Kanna, who was murmuring with an unusual look in her eyes. Kanna nonchalantly shook her head and then moved ahead, releasing her hold on Prince Katchian and Kiolle.

After pushing through the hail and darkness for a short distance, they came upon Duke Herne's servants and other non-Awakener people who had been rescued after getting lost, as well as a few members of the Cavalry who seemed to be guarding them. The atmosphere among the non-Awakeners was gloomy, with some constantly wiping away tears. Kiolle, feeling a bit out of place, carried Katchian at the very back of the group. Coincidentally, Myra and Kanna were there too.

"If the person you're carrying is too heavy, our members can help," Kanna offered.

“It’s fine, really…”

“Okay, then. I asked because your cheek seemed quite swollen. It must be painful where you got hit.”

“…”

‘Why do they speak as if they know something I don’t?’ Kiolle wondered, feeling uneasy, while Kanna turned to look at Myra.

“Oh, I wasn’t talking about the First Princess’s cheek.”

“…I see.”

Myra responded as if she understood why Kanna had looked back at her, even though she hadn’t said anything. She nodded familiarly and then resumed walking.

‘Cheek… the First Princess’s cheek…? Now that I think about it… the First Princess also has a swollen wound on her cheek… Was she hit? By whom? Who would dare strike the First Princess of the Herne family?’

Kiolle was startled to notice for the first time that there was indeed a red, swollen mark on Myra’s pale cheek. Despite her wet, bedraggled evening gown and the injury, the First Princess walked on her own, without a word of complaint or allowing anyone to carry her.

Absorbing this unexpected sight, Kiolle was suddenly jolted by a shout from ahead.

“Monsters ahead!”

Kiolle was startled, wondering if he should put down the Crown Prince and prepare to fight.

“How many?”

“About ten. Not sure, though!”

“We can handle that many. Don’t avoid them, just push through! Get ready and wait a moment!”

Surprisingly, the non-members of the Cavalry, unlike Kiolle, showed little reaction, as if they had experienced such incidents before. While two members of the Cavalry were gathering the non-Awakeners, including Kiolle. Kanna, who had thrown the hailstone, knelt on one knee and placed her hand on the ground.

Invisible energy surged, and Kanna’s eyes shone a bright blue.

“Okay. Exactly twelve. Same type as the monsters we’ve encountered before. No peculiarities. Spread out to the left and right, and on my signal, annihilate them!”

“Understood!”

The Cavalry members dispersed with impeccable coordination. Despite being significantly outnumbered by the twelve monsters, not a single one of them showed fear.

Soon, a faint vibration signaled the approach of the monsters.

‘Is this really happening… Am I just supposed to stand here and do nothing?’

As Kiolle was gasping for breath, overwhelmed with the urge to flee, someone beside him struck up a conversation.

“You seem very nervous, but don’t worry. If there were about fifty monsters, it would be wise to avoid them, but ten is no problem at all.”

Turning his head, Kiolle saw a Cavalry member speaking with a calm expression. Despite the wounds scattered across his skin, suggesting numerous battles had been fought on the way, his demeanor was completely composed. Kiolle wondered how such a newly formed group could be so relaxed.

‘Could it be they’re overconfident because they haven’t faced monsters before?’

Kiolle recalled the monsters he had faced during training with the Imperial Knights. Even the training monsters, which were almost powerless, had been terrifyingly strong and chilling. That was during a safe training session, and now, this was real combat.

Although Yuder Aile was said to be a monstrous figure beyond standards, he had never properly seen the strength of the other Cavalry members, so he couldn’t bring himself to believe it.

“…But it’s so dark… and hard to see. How do you plan to…?”

What if, by some chance, they failed to handle the monsters properly, or decided to save themselves and ran away?

“I’d rather fight too.”

“Oh? Brave of you, especially with your legs shaking like that…”

“What?!”

“Appreciate the sentiment, but it’s unnecessary. Not that we’re underestimating the non-Awakener, but we’re best suited to handle this situation. Any unexpected interference might just cause chaos.”

“…”

“Ha. That’s a cool line, right? One of our Deputy Commanders said it once; I’ve been waiting to use it. Anyway, we won’t leave you behind. We’ll make sure you get out safely, so just stay put.”

With a smile, the Cavalry member patted Kiolle’s shoulder, and a translucent barrier of energy formed from his fingertips.

“…”

“They’re coming!”

Kanna’s sharp cry was the signal for the monsters to emerge. As Kiolle glimpsed the gleaming eyes of the pitch-black monsters blending into the darkness, a wave of fear made him flinch. The hidden members of the Cavalry then launched their attack from both sides.

The battle was swiftly decided. While the members of the Cavalry couldn’t claim to be as overwhelmingly powerful as Yuder, they still managed to defeat all the monsters without sustaining any serious injuries, shaking off the blood and catching their breath.

“Ha… Haa.”

“Any injuries?”

“None.”

“No monster left breathing… Move out!”

At Kanna’s hand signal, the Cavalry members, though barely rested, quickly reformed their formation, positioning themselves to protect the non-Awakeners.

Kiolle, carrying the Crown Prince, moved within their protection, observing the backs of the Cavalry members.

Under normal circumstances… as a knight, he too should have been protecting others.

But now, he was the one being protected, hiding behind others.

The very person he had tried so hard and sincerely to save had not trusted him and had insulted him with a slap, while these Cavalry members, whom he had disregarded, were saving them without any apparent reason.

Without asking for anything in return.

This realization stirred an unfamiliar feeling in Kiolle Diarca for the first time.

Unaware of what was growing inside his heart, invisible to the eye, the hail continued to fall relentlessly upon the heads of the people.

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Chapter 864

In this particular crack, the monsters that emerged were not individually as powerful as those that had appeared before. Their primary strength lay in their vast numbers and swift movement. They employed a surrounding tactic in their attacks, and their tendency to scatter like dust and flee in all directions when outmatched was the only real issue.

No matter how powerful the Awakeners were, they were vastly outnumbered by the monsters. There was a limit to how many they could confront at once, making it impossible to stem the tide of monsters pouring out of the crack in a single stroke. As the number of monsters began to dwindle, the tide of battle shifted, resembling a chase after a swarm of ants fleeing from humans.

“There they go! Chase them!”

“Quick, send word outside! The monsters are escaping beyond the temple grounds!”

Signal flares continued to embroider the sky, while the sounds of clashing weapons and various powers illuminated the darkness.

Amidst all this, near the forest behind the temple, on a blood-soaked ground, another intense battle was underway, as fierce as those fighting in the midst.

“Feed him the white, brown, and black in that order! Don’t tie the wounds too loosely, secure them properly! No splints? Just break some wood from over there!”

Enon, after setting up a temporary shelter near Yuder to shield them from hail and cold, struggled to treat Yuder with the help of a few members who had voluntarily stayed and Lusan. He had brought all the medicine he could carry, along with blankets and tools for lying down, yet it was still woefully inadequate.

He had set up the tent here without moving Yuder because he judged that even a small movement could be unbearable in Yuder's current state. However, the makeshift tent was just that, a temporary solution, trembling as if about to collapse whenever the hail grew slightly more intense. Eventually, two team members had to hold up the poles to keep it standing.

"…"

Regardless of the tent's shuddering, Yuder, lying with closed eyes and sweating profusely, emitted such intense heat from his body that it seemed like mirages were rising from him. The clean hailstones brought in as a substitute for ice melted into water in an instant.

"Grab his arm! Align the bones!"

"Yes, yes!"

Cuts and bruises or contusions were easy to handle for Lusan using his divine power. However, setting a broken limb was a different story. It wasn't a clean break but misaligned, so before using divine power to mend it, the bones had to be properly aligned, which was no easy task. They needed to lower the fever and stabilize his energy, and also needed to administer medicine, all while monitoring the dark veins that had risen all over his body. They were overwhelmed, feeling as if even ten bodies would not be enough.

Meanwhile, more injured members from inside the temple began to report in, increasing their workload.

"Pharmacist! Priest! Three more injured have been added; should we gather them all in that building for now?"

"Again? If it's not life-threatening, just gather them there!"

"Pharmacist! Is it difficult for the injured to come here because of the hail?"

"Use your eyes. We're already full here with this guy and your Commander! Don't ask any more!"

“Yes!”

“Damn it! Is it possible that all those who know how to use divine power in this huge temple have fled? Huh?! These damned fools! Always useless! Taking tithes for food and building structures?!

“…”

Enon’s harsh swearing would normally have elicited a retort from Lusan, but this time, he chose to ignore it. The words were, after all, indisputably true.

Enon frowned and spoke up when the number of gathered injured surpassed twenty.

“Kid! Now that the bones are set, pour in the divine power, and once you’re done, head to that building and take charge there!”

“Are you sure you’ll be okay? Managing these two by yourself, Sir Enon…”

The injuries of those gathered in the building were serious, but still within the realms of being treatable with divine power alone. However, the two patients in the tent posed a greater challenge; their conditions were so complex that it was hard to know where to start.

Truth be told, had Lusan been alone, he would have been at a loss on how to manage Yuder and Kishiar, who sat dazed, still awaiting proper treatment.

“You’ve done all you can with divine power. I’ll call if I need you, now go!”

“Okay, I will! But you must call if you need me…!”

“Do you think I wouldn’t? Just manage your strength properly! Don’t use too much on one person! And if I call and find you’ve exhausted yourself, you’ll be the first to hear about it! And take the white medicine from over there when you leave!”

“Yes!”

Divine power is a force manifested based on the priest’s vitality and life force. Using too much at once could lead to fainting, and in severe cases, rapid aging or even death.

Of course, Lusan had never pushed himself to such extremes, and the tales of priests dying from overuse of divine power were now more like folklore. Nonetheless, Enon warned him sharply, as if genuinely concerned that it could happen.

Enon, not a priest himself, yet suspiciously knowledgeable about divine power and deeply versed in the nearly forgotten art of herbology, often left Lusan wondering about his true identity. Despite this curiosity, Lusan always kept these questions to himself.

What mattered most was that Enon’s concern for him was genuine and sincere.

‘And it’s not just divine power that Enon knows so well… He’s strangely knowledgeable about magic too. Maybe he used to be an apprentice to a mage who studied herbology… It’s possible. After all, studying herbs inevitably involves delving into temple research.’

Indeed, Thais Yulman, who had previously conducted research on medicinal herbs, and his apprentice Alik, both mages, found common ground with Lusan in their discussions.

Lusan grabbed the white medicine jar Enon had instructed him to take and dashed out of the tent. This particular medicine, a special concoction made by Enon from ground herbs, was highly effective for stopping bleeding and restoring vitality.

Taking advantage of the moment when most of the other members had left to protect Lusan, Enon gently lifted the hem of Yuder’s ceremonial robe.

The dark veins, which had spread from the heart area down to the legs, were rampant.

‘But… unusually, there’s a different pattern around the lower abdomen.’

The dark veins in the area just below the navel, unlike other parts, were not branching out but instead were clumped together in a disordered mass. About the size of an adult man’s fist,

this clump looked almost like a seed, and in another sense, like a final destination for everything.

What was crucial was the immense swirling of power that could be felt emanating from that spot.

To Enon, it seemed undeniable that the tremendous heat emanating from Yuder was caused by that peculiar anomaly.

“….The medicine you gave earlier has dissolved and been swallowed. What should I do next?”

It was then that a low, soft voice reached his ears. As Enon covered Yuder’s body with the clothing, he turned his head. Kishiar, who had been quietly observing Enon, was sitting in a folding chair that the members had brought along with the tent from inside the temple. His face, partly wrapped in bandages, presented an unusual appearance.

Of course, it was Enon who had applied those bandages.

As soon as the tent was erected, Enon, along with Lusan, had attended to Kishiar’s face. The lacerations and eyes, once cleaned of blood, revealed a horrifying extent of injury. Fortunately, there were no signs of poison or other complications, so Lusan’s divine power worked exceptionally well. Enon decided that although Kishiar would need to avoid direct sunlight for a while, at least there would be no lasting scars on his skin.

If Yuder Aile had been there, he would have been most relieved to hear this news, probably never tiring of gazing upon Kishiar’s face all day.

‘Damn it! Why should I even care about such things? Whether he likes it or not, it has nothing to do with me!’

Observing Yuder Aile, one couldn’t help but notice how his gaze often and quite lingeringly fell upon Kishiar La Orr’s face. Of course, as his assistant who spent most of his day by Kishiar’s side, this might seem natural. However, having come to know their relationship, Enon didn’t see it that way at all.

The Yuder Aile he knew wasn’t someone to stare unnecessarily at someone else for long, even if his profession demanded it. Though often appearing expressionless, the depth of unsettling and itchy feelings packed in his gaze towards Kishiar was probably something he himself was unaware of.

And Enon, too, wished he could remain oblivious to it! For a lifetime!

After treating Kishiar’s face and administering the medicine, Enon glanced briefly in the direction of the earlier treatment and spoke.

“How do you feel now? Any changes in your body?”

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Chapter 865

“How do you feel now? Any changes in your body?”

“Indeed… the pain has remarkably subsided. It’s astonishing, considering I’ve never had any painkillers for the internal pain.”

Kishiar spoke indifferently, a humorless expression on his face.

“May I inquire about the herbs used in this?”

“There are things I can speak of and those I cannot. It’s a bit complicated.”

“I thought as much. After all, the medicine you gave me was different from the start.”

In the midst of their conversation, Enon’s busy hands paused momentarily.

“…But how could you tell? They were all taken from the same medicine jar.”

“Even if they look the same and are mixed in the same jar, you can’t completely hide the different ingredients used, especially if they’re imbued with even a trace of magic.”

The last part was uttered so softly that no one but Enon could hear it. Kishiar tilted his head slightly, continuing his words thoughtfully.

“It’s best to hide a secret in plain sight, among similar things. But I must say, the method used for differentiation is quite exceptional. Frankly, I was astounded by such delicate manipulation, having never seen it before.”

Enon’s yellow eyes narrowed, a mix of incredulity, annoyance, and admiration in his gaze.

“Ha… To think that even the child who handles those jars daily didn’t notice, and yet you discerned it after just one dose. Had you been born five hundred years earlier, you would have reigned as an Archmage.”

“I’ve heard that a few times,” Kishiar said, nodding slightly without a smile.

“But someone as wise as you must know that not everyone sensitive to magic makes a good mage. Magic is challenging. The strain it places on the body is too great. Even if I had been born back then, I might not have become a mage.”

“…”

“Fear not. If I hadn’t noticed the difference between the scent of the medicine given to Yuder and mine, despite being from the same source, it would have been difficult to detect the magic. If I could do it, it’s unlikely others could.”

Kishiar La Orr, as Yuder’s tales suggested, was not an ordinary human. Even Enon, who had lived through many years, couldn’t help but be slightly astounded upon witnessing his abilities firsthand.

In the days of yore, brimming with talented individuals, there had been none who possessed such a plethora of skills, who could use them so organically and yet not lose their sanity. At least, not since Enon had come into being and begun observing the world.

Kishiar had pieced together the true nature of the medicine from the slightest of clues, discerning Enon’s intentions hidden behind it, leaving the other without a retort, his response too perfect. For anyone conversing with him, it was an incredibly, intensely, and immensely frustrating experience.

‘So, to put it simply… I understand everything, but if you don’t want to talk about it, that’s fine. Trust is already established since I took your medicine without question. That’s it.’

To others, it might not seem unusual for a member of the Cavalry to speak this way to a mere apothecary. However, a closer listen revealed a subtle undertone in Kishiar's words and flow, perceptible only to Enon.

It seemed like condescension, but it wasn't entirely so. The look in his eyes and his demeanor were slightly different from how one would treat a true subordinate. It was evident he knew Enon was no ordinary person and hence maintained a certain line of respect.

'You still have your wits about you despite being completely shaken up internally? You must be mad, utterly.'

Of course, when it came to the extent of madness, no one could surpass the man who now lay unconscious under Enon's care. However, Kishiar was not far behind in this regard.

It was said that humans are inevitably drawn to those who resemble them internally, and this saying couldn't be more accurate. Whether it was the man lying here broken and battered after fighting and sacrificing himself, or the one who seemed less physically damaged but was internally just as ravaged, yet stood upright and continued to think clearly, both were equally cursed.

Enon gazed quietly at the man who, under normal circumstances, would have either been dead or writhing on the ground in agony. During their conversation, Kishiar's gaze had remained steadfastly on Yuder. Though his mouth spoke of other matters, his eyes, unwavering and sincere, focused solely on one place, slightly easing Enon's irritation.

'Damn it all. It's my own fault for getting involved.'

Enon turned his head sharply and spoke.

"You probably know this already, but the medicine you just took is merely a painkiller to suppress the pain temporarily. I can't do more in this situation, so absolutely avoid exerting yourself, and try not to move even a finger if possible. I'll give you two more pills; take one if the pain worsens."

Kishiar accepted the medicine offered by Enon and nodded as he looked at it.

“I understand. Just reducing the pain to this extent feels like a miracle, so I have no further demands. However…”

For the first time, the man hesitated in his speech. Enon asked with a blunt face.

“What’s next? What about ‘that’ which has spread through Yuder’s body? Do you think it can improve?”

“…”

Enon looked silently at Yuder, who lay still, radiating an intense fever. Without specific mention, both knew that ‘that’ referred to the power absorbed from the Red Stone into Yuder’s body. This power, which had permeated his blood and spread throughout his body in a dark crimson pattern, was something even Enon had always found difficult to conjecture.

The pure essence of the red stone’s power. Yet Yuder had not only absorbed it into his body without dying but had also adapted and utilized it to some extent.

“Every time Yuder used the power of an Awakener, it would spread. Normally, it would extend to a certain range and then fade away, but occasionally, when he exceeded his usual limits and hit a sort of barrier… a wall, it would spread further than the usual areas.”

“…”

“I’ve always observed that it was Yuder’s own… a kind of ‘choice’ that led to this result. Knowing what would happen, he chose to break through that wall, accepting the greater burden it placed on his body and allowing ‘that’ to spread, but in return, he could exert a level of power that was impossible at the time.”

Enon’s eyes flickered in response.

“Tell me more about it.”

“Just now, when it was the last moment to handle Hosanna, Yuder was in a state where he had no strength left, not even enough to defend himself. But in that moment…”

Incredibly, flames shot up along the sword, and Yuder pierced Hosanna with that power. Simultaneously, the dark veins that climbed Yuder’s body spread to the widest range they ever had, seizing control over his entire body.

Kishiar was the one who had witnessed the process most closely, never missing a moment. He was also a being who, though not as much as Yuder himself, had clearly sensed and understood the process that others could not fathom.

In a situation where it made sense for no strength to be used, the question arose: from where had this surpassing power emerged? The answer surely lay in the dark veins that covered Yuder’s body.

After finishing his explanation, Kishiar turned to Enon and continued.

“When everything was over, I asked Yuder if he had ‘chosen’.”

Enon, slowly crossing his arms, looked down at Yuder and spoke.

“So, what did this guy say?”

“He said… ‘yes.’”

Silence, cold and heavy, fell between the two for a moment.

“…Hah.”

Enon ran his fingers through his hair, letting out a short breath. The sigh, laden with irritation and anger, could not hide the profound emotion within.

“This idiot… what on earth… during all this time… what were they all…”

“It’s partly my fault as well, that he made such a choice. I have no words.”

“…Ah!”

Enon, growing even angrier at Kishiar’s calm admission of his own fault, clenched his fists and trembled.

“Right now, it’s not a situation to be solved by blaming anyone, so let’s not talk about that, okay?”

“…”

“Ha, if he could just open his eyes, I’d have pounded his head ten times over… But since that’s not possible, let’s drop it. Anyway, yes. Whether this spreading thing on his body will heal or not, I cannot say for certain.”

Kishiar’s lone red eye grew darker with his conclusive words.

“Then…”

“We also can’t assume he’s going to die soon. Anyway, this guy has always been like this, coming back to life after such episodes. You know that better than anyone, don’t you?”

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Chapter 866

“We also can’t assume he’s going to die soon. Anyway, this guy has always been like this, coming back to life after such episodes. You know that better than anyone, don’t you?”

Despite the somewhat harsh and disrespectful reference, Kishiar’s expression remained unchanged. He slowly scanned Yuder’s face, who was lying down, and simply nodded in agreement.

“Yes, that’s true.”

“The injuries are severe, but they can heal. The fever… it’s surprisingly not internal damage, considering how high it is. It’s not fatal.”

Enon guessed that this was probably due to the incessant sweat flowing from Yuder. While certain illnesses worsen with excessive sweating, Yuder’s condition seemed like his body was struggling to cool down the unusual heat rising from within.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the harsh weather with heavy hail and coldness was externally cooling his body, which so far hadn’t posed any major problems.

‘It does look a bit concerning, though.’

Thus, the real issue, as Enon also couldn’t fully understand, was the dark red veins and the power of the Red Stone flowing within them. This was a problem that Yuder had to resolve himself, as no one else could help.

‘And there’s one more thing.’

“The integration of soul and body might be the actual problem.”

Hearing Enon’s mumbled words, Kishiar narrowed his eyes slightly before relaxing them again. A voice, a bit deeper than before, flowed from his dry

lips.

“The integration of soul and body?”

“Didn’t he tell you about that?”

“…”

“Well, anyway. Even if you heard it, it’s not something you’d easily grasp. Besides, this guy seems unaware of the state of his own soul.”

Describing an unfelt pain was useless; it wouldn’t bring proper awareness. Given Yuder’s nature, he might not have considered it a significant problem compared to others.

‘After all, he’s been getting better recently.’

But Enon was different. He opened his mouth, recalling the first time he saw Yuder in his pharmacy.

“My eyes are quite different from others. I can see not only the physical body but also the collection of vital energy and consciousness within it. In other words, the soul. These are essential for any living being and result in a terrible death if separated or damaged. Well, it’s more complicated than that, but let’s leave it at this for now. Usually, I try not to see it, but sometimes, it’s unavoidable.”

Yuder was one of those he had seen. Enon continued his emotionless explanation while wiping Yuder’s sweat-soaked face with a soft cloth.

“When I first saw this guy, I was shocked to find a person whose soul seemed ready to separate from the body but was still alive and walking around. The state of his soul was a mess, so painful, yet he felt nothing.”

It was astonishing enough that a human with such a damaged soul hadn’t died, but the way the soul was integrated with the body was unbelievable.

“So, what about my soul? Is it similar?”

To Kishiar’s question, Enon shook his head indifferently.

“No. Yours is normal. Very normal. Your internal issues are a different matter.”

“Is that so?”

“At least you won’t collapse and die from your soul ripping or separating suddenly while walking. That’s typical for humans. Where would you find such a person, anyway?”

“Normally, it’s common to never see such a thing in a lifetime.”

“…”

“Anyway, if left as is, it would lead to a horrific death. So, feeling uneasy, I took some helpful measures and have been watching over him. He has improved significantly while being with you, Commander.”

Enon, though reluctant to admit it, especially after they started to physically entwined, noticed the strengthening bond between body and soul. Recently, he even thought that the bond itself might not need much worry, despite the lingering damage to the soul.

“So, what about now?”

“As you might have guessed, the bond between his body and soul is inherently weak. When his body becomes frail, the already fragile bond weakens further. Remember the incident in the west, when he was injured fighting the giant monster?”

“It’s an unforgettable memory.”

“Back then, there was a strap tied to his scabbard, designed to absorb the impacts on his soul. But it was completely severed during that incident. I had given him the last one I had, but…”

Enon and Kishiar’s gazes simultaneously turned to the same spot. There lay Yuder’s sword and scabbard, neatly placed. The Cavalry members who

helped pitch the tent had picked them up from nearby.

The red strap, tightly wound around the upper part of the sword handle, had withstood many rigorous training sessions and battles without damage. But now, it was half-worn and barely hanging on.

“…I see. I understand.”

Kishiar’s voice became drier and rougher.

“So, what should I do? If he’s gotten better while with me, there must be something I can do to help.”

Enon’s previously solemn expression crumpled momentarily. After taking a breath, as if mentally stretching Yuder’s cheek ten times, he spoke with effort.

“That, well, ha. Think about that after you yourself have recovered. Right now, even if you were to die and come back to life, it’s impossible to help or do anything.”

“So, physical contact is still the best way to help, I see.”

‘Ah! This is so infuriating, that guy!’

But he understood why Kishiar was insistent. His own condition was irrelevant; his only desire was to help and heal Yuder by any means. Knowing this, Enon suppressed the words he couldn’t say and replied.

“…Ha. If you’re that determined to help, then just stay by his side like this. That alone is far better than any other unnecessary actions. So, stop asking pointless questions about a patient who shouldn’t move even a finger, and just sit there quietly.”

Enon gestured towards the tent’s entrance. The sound of Cavalry members returning nearby signaled his intention to conclude their conversation. As he calmly continued to wipe Yuder, pretending as if the previous discussion had never happened, Kishiar let out a sigh that was almost a laugh.

“What’s that about?”

Could it be the pain had finally driven him mad? While Enon was pondering this, Kishiar shook his head.

“No. I was just reminded of something Yuder once said about you. He called you a person like bread.”

“…What? The bread you eat?”

“Yes. He said, on the outside you might seem hard, but inside you’re soft like Western-style bread. Seeing you today, it seems he was right.”

At this unheard-of comparison, Enon was momentarily speechless. Anger and annoyance filled his face, which twisted as if he was holding something back, and his hand, wiping Yuder, trembled slightly.

To an onlooker, it might seem like a display of great anger. But Kishiar saw the flush of red creeping up the apothecary’s ears and neck, even as he bit his lip.

“Damn it… Crazy… Bread, of all things… Always such ridiculous comparisons… Why would he share that with someone else…”

Despite his muttered curses, his strength was undeniably drained.

Kishiar watched him for a moment, then slowly shifted his gaze through the tent opening to the sky.

No more monsters were spilling from the crack now. The crack itself, gradually fading and becoming more indistinct, seemed like it would disappear completely soon.

‘The aftermath of the disturbance in the balance seems to be ending. Then, the hail might also weaken soon.’

However, the monsters that had already emerged wouldn’t just die off, so others would have to deal with them. Still, it was a relief that no new ones were pouring out, reducing the burden.

‘But even if we manage to contain them within the temple ground, it’s impossible to stop every monster that has escaped.’

Considering the Cavalry members’ injuries weren’t severe, the monsters weren’t particularly strong. Yet, to those who hadn’t awakened, even a single one could be a significant threat.

Worry naturally filled his mind, but he knew this wasn’t the time for him to step in.

‘From there on… I can only hope that what we’ve done so far holds some meaning.’

Kishiar turned his gaze back to Yuder, quietly spinning the strategy game board in his mind.

The board, previously divided into regions and pads representing various parts of the South, was now shifting from specific sections to encompass a broader area.

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Chapter 867

“Monsters!”

“What? Where did those suddenly come from?!”

“Everyone, get away!”

The temple where the funeral was being held was located in the heart of Charloin. Those who saw the monsters escaping from there and running amok through alley after alley could hardly believe their eyes and screamed in horror.

A few monsters, emitting sharp and eerie sounds, were about to chase after those who were running away, when suddenly, an attack flew in swiftly from somewhere and pierced through the head of the foremost monster in a flash.

–!!

The pierced monster died on the spot without making a sound. The remaining monsters reflexively looked around, but could neither find the weapon that attacked them nor its owner.

That was when it happened.

“Now!”

“Hyaaa!”

“Aaaah!”

Voices echoed from what seemed like empty air, and then, people who had been lying in ambush over the walls on either side burst out and launched their attack. Thanks to the successful ambush, the monsters were unable to mount a proper defense and soon fell one after the other.

Only then did someone appear from the seemingly empty space. A woman holding several daggers in her hands, gasping for breath, looked around at the people nearby and spoke.

“Is anyone hurt…”

“No… no one. Thank you!”

These were none other than Cyregina and the Awakeners from the Star of Nagran. Ever since the illegal fight club incident, they had stayed at the branch and had come out together for the sole purpose of dealing with the monsters.

At the current southern branch, there were hardly any members left. At best, there were only a minimum number of people to guard the criminals and defend the branch building, the mages, and those who were not yet official members.

This was enough to defend the branch from any ordinary threat, but the sudden screams that began to be heard surpassed everyone’s expectations. For reasons unknown, monsters were roaming around the city center. Those who discovered this gathered and, after a meeting, bravely decided to step outside, even though no one had ordered them to.

To guard the branch until the Cavalry returned, and to save the people of Charloin from the threat of the monsters.

Fortunately, the day was foul, and unexpected hail kept most of Charloin’s residents holed up at home. The monsters, not having the nature to break down closed doors or climb over walls to harm humans, were not too difficult to handle.

Of course, this didn’t mean they weren’t dangerous. Several Awakeners were injured while dealing with the monsters and had to be carried back into the branch.

However, among the Awakeners from the Star of Nagran present as well as Cyregina, none were injured. This was entirely due to Cyregina’s

exceptional stealth and reconnaissance abilities.

The Awakeners from the Star of Nagran followed Cyregina, who looked rather awkward, examining their wounds and moving forward. Normally, she kept her distance from others due to the sins she bore, but today she was the first to step out to defend the branch.

Although it wasn't said aloud, everyone guessed that it was probably because of Reneve, who was continuously exerting her power of suppression within the branch.

'I've heard she isn't entirely a bad person, but I've been too scared to approach her until now… But today alone, I've already received her help three times.'

Jack, a boy among the Awakeners from the Star of Nagran, looked at Cyregina and awkwardly scratched his head.

'I must properly greet her once this is over and we return!'

"My God! What to do. The monsters keep appearing… Are the people who went out all right…? It's impossible to know from here."

Inside the branch building, Alik, who was unable to stay still, kept peeking outside through the curtains. Suddenly, startled by a door opening behind him, he turned his head.

"Gasp?"

The person who emerged was Hellem, clad in a thick waterproof robe and holding a slender staff embedded with magic stones.

"Mage Hellem? You gave me quite a fright. But what is this attire… what are you doing?"

"Can't you tell?"

"Don't tell me you're planning to go outside now?!"

“Why. Is there a law that says old folks must never go outside?”

Hellem asked with a smile. Alik, trained in sensitivity by his temperamental master over many years, immediately realized that it wasn’t a genuine smile and promptly prostrated himself.

“No! Of course not!”

“Then?”

“It’s just that… the monsters appearing now are dangerous enough to injure even the Awakeners. What if you get hurt? That would be terrible! I’m… I’m worried…”

“That’s precisely why I’m going out.”

“What?”

Alik lifted his head, confused by the incomprehensible response. Hellem looked calmly at her chubby-cheeked junior mage and spoke.

“As you said, everyone is currently in sudden danger due to the monster outbreak. I don’t want to stay hidden here, watching young children, barely teenagers, go out to protect us and help others.”

“…”

Alik blinked in silence, lost for words. Hellem gave him a faintly bitter smile.

“This should have been the duty of knights and mages. Seeing that none of them are appearing anywhere, it’s quite telling, but still, someone has to do it.”

“But, but… We don’t even have proper magic tools or magic stones here. How are you planning to prepare magic to face those monsters… Mage Hellem, you are not a combat specialist, but a monster research expert…”

“That’s right. I am a monster research expert. And that’s exactly why I think it’s time for me to step in. Don’t you see?”

“What do you mean by that…”

As Alik muttered in astonishment, something suddenly clicked in his mind.

He remembered something his master, Thais Yulman, had said after hearing about Hellem’s joining.

‘Thought she died researching somewhere… Tsk. Never thought I’d see her here again… Well, it’s not like someone of her caliber would die that easily! She’s the only mage I know who has lived to old age and retired while researching monsters!’

Alik had never thought of Hellem as anything but a purely research-focused mage, but the subjects she dealt with were far more dangerous than those he or his master handled.

To study monsters, one inevitably had to visit places where monsters were seen. In other words, she willingly ventured into death’s domain and even calmly faced creatures that could turn on her and kill her at any moment.

A mage who had survived such dangerous research and lived to retire with all limbs intact.

A mage who, despite that, still hadn’t stopped researching.

As the meaning of this suddenly hit home, a chill ran down Alik’s spine.

Watching the silent Alik, Hellem let out a small laugh.

“Boy, when I was young, I fought with my bare hands without any of that. And what kind of a mage would I be if I didn’t have at least one secret spell to respond to any situation?”

Hellem shook the slender staff in her hand. The thin and fragile staff, hardly more than a snapped-off twig, did not appear threatening in the least.

However, the magic stone hanging at its end was a different story. Alik belatedly realized that this was the trump card Hellem had brought all the way here.

“There’s probably no other mage who knows monsters as well as I do. From here, I see that these creatures tend to move in groups, but they lack camaraderie and only have forward vision. They’re vulnerable to traps. So, what should we do?”

“Lay traps… perhaps?”

“Right. That’s why I need to go out. You stay here and take good care of Penpen.”

“Wait just a minute!”

Alik shouted, trying to stop Hellem as she began to stride out.

“Mage Hellem. I want to help too! Please let me come with you!”

“What? If you’re feeling guilty and just going to be a burden, forget it. Feeding Penpen would be more helpful to me than having a scaredy-cat tag along.”

“I, I admit I’m scared, but Mage Hellem… You seem to forget… I’m also an Awakener!”

At that, Hellem blinked slowly for the first time.

“Oh… right, I forgot. But how would that be helpful?”

Alik, feeling a subtle disbelief in Hellem’s gaze, shouted defensively.

“I haven’t just been doing nothing all this time. I’ve been researching and training to use my magic and Awakener abilities together, to get the most out of the least amount of power.”

“You’ve been doing that?”

“Of course, I didn’t just come up with it myself… I asked Yuder for training advice… But still, I can be of use even in a situation like this!”

Alik clenched his fist and exclaimed. He had never been in actual combat, but his words were true.

Through his research with his master, he had grown strong enough to conjure a few cups of water. He had been training, whenever he could, to use that power efficiently in battle and everyday life, having sought advice from Yuder. His goal and dream were to brilliantly utilize not just the power of an Awakener, but also tools, combining the two.

“In fact, I have quite a few other tools that I made while experimenting with making suppression devices. I thought that if I adapted the method of making magic tools, I might be able to change the output with the power of an Awakener and use it in different ways…”

“You’re too wordy. Can’t we just go?”

“That, that’s what I mean! I have quite a few spare tools that will surely be useful!”

Hellem looked at the young mage, visibly frightened yet flushed with excitement, and nodded as if she had no choice.

“It’s normally forbidden to use unverified items… But fine, this time I’ll let it slide. Just take care of yourself and don’t get in the way.”

“Of course!”

The two mages, determined, gathered their gear and stepped outside. Thus began another surprising whirlwind around the southern branch.

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Chapter 868

A massive monster outbreak occurred, an event that could not be resolved by the power of any single person. However, thanks to the miraculous hands of aid that reached out from various corners of Charloin, a major disaster was averted.

Fishermen, worried about their livelihoods as their boats could be damaged by hail, came out and were saved by the Cavalry candidates, who in return helped with the evacuation. Galleum, a priestess residing in a small temple in a corner of Charloin, led her team of healing specialists to selflessly treat the injured on the streets. The temple also graciously offered its limited space for the injured.

The knights and servants remaining in the mansion where Lady Myra, the First Princess, stayed, opened their doors and reached out to help those in trouble. Over time, some members of the faction of the deceased Second Prince, who had not been on good terms with them, also began to assist. They were inspired by Lady Myra's genuine grief over the Second Prince.

Despite the reports of the incident outside, the Lord of Charloin did not emerge. Instead, a senior administrator used his authority to assess the situation and sent help. This administrator had recently decided to extend his influence to both the Duke of Herne and the Emperor's side after a light defeat by Duke Peletta.

The Sapphire Mage Union and the Merchant Guild, who had made connections with the Cavalry after Yuder's tumultuous first day in the south, hesitantly lent a hand. Knowing well the importance of seizing the moment for future acclaim, they overcame their fears to participate.

Lower nobles of the Emperor's faction, who had been quietly supporting the Cavalry from behind the scenes, and Awakeners who had yet to reveal their identities, began to inquire discreetly about how they could assist.

It was akin to watching pieces gradually come together on a game board.

Yet, not everyone encountered fortune due to these events.

During a time when most people were too busy to look around, Diemon, an Awakener once a follower of the Sage from the Star of Nagran, struggled to open his eyes in the darkness.

‘Why am I here?’ he wondered, terrified by his fragmented memory and excruciating pain. He gradually began to understand the situation as he gasped for breath.

‘Ah, yes. It was Nahan… He took me out and was supposed to bring me to the sage, but the sage…’

Diemon’s expression hardened as he recalled the sage, who never really paid attention to him even in Nahan’s presence. Biting his lip, he looked around. His boiling emotions were separate from his desire to survive.

He was trapped somewhere, gagged, and tightly bound, and he faintly saw others in a similar state. Upon closer inspection, they were Awakeners who had followed Nahan.

‘We’ve all been captured… Fortunately, we’re not dead yet.’

Diemon was lucky to regain consciousness first before the others. Seeing no guards around, he thought of escaping.

“Ugh…uh…”

Despite the difficulty due to his injuries, Diemon thought hard and found another way. He rolled over to a fallen Awakener nearby and pressed his elbow. Reacting to the pressure, the elbow bone transformed into a sharp weapon, jutting out unexpectedly.

That Awakener’s ability, long considered useful by Diemon, proved fortunate that he remembered how to utilize it. Diemon desperately rubbed the rope binding his wrists against the protruding bone. He trembled at the thought of another Awakener waking up, but thankfully, due to the sharpness of the bone, the rope was almost completely severed before long.

Once his hands were free, untying the rest was easy.

“Haah… Ha…”

Diemon rose to his feet, swallowing the pain in his improperly healed arm. Despite sweating profusely from the pain, his determination to survive drove him to search the darkness and find the only exit of the space he was trapped in.

He sensed someone’s presence outside the thick door. It seemed the guards were not absent but were instead stationed outside, guarding the door.

Diemon despaired momentarily, but an opportunity soon presented itself.

“…Help! Hurry…!”

“Aaaah!”

With an indistinct explosion in the distance, the building shook faintly. After a few loud shouts, the presences at the door rushed off towards something, leaving silence behind.

Instinctively, Diemon knew this was his only chance to escape. The door, unsurprisingly locked when he tried it, was no obstacle as he limped over to another unconscious Awakener. He was an attacker capable of softening whatever he touched.

“Ugh…ugh…”

Extracting power caused much greater pain than usual. Tearfully and with great effort, Diemon managed to copy a portion of the ability and approached the door.

Finally, after much struggle, his weakened power twisted the solidly locked door mechanism, and Diemon made his escape.

‘It’s still… the temple.’

Only after stepping outside did Diemon realize they were not far from where the battle had taken place. The Cavalry members must have hastily gathered the fallen Awakeners and placed them here temporarily, though he couldn't be sure.

Hearing the distant sounds of battle, Diemon hurried in the opposite direction. Though he had escaped his immediate confines, finding another exit to leave the building entirely was necessary.

How long had he limped through the corridors? Suddenly, he heard a faint sound like someone pounding on a door.

"…help me…"

It was a very faint voice, but mysteriously, Diemon instantly knew whose it was.

It was the very person Diemon had been desperately thinking about, the one who made him shudder with anger - the sage.

Had the sage also survived, unseen by Diemon? Enthralled, he turned towards the source of the sound. From behind a door similar to the one he had been behind, the pounding and the sage's faint cries grew louder.

With no guards in sight, it seemed the guards had indeed all left to join the battle.

Diemon stood still, listening intently. From behind the door, the sage's fading pleas continued.

"Anyone… please help me… If there are any brothers or sisters who can hear this person's call…"

"…"

"Is there truly no one…? Even members of the Cavalry would be welcome. I possess no attack abilities… It's unjust… If only someone would listen to this person's story, just once…"

It was a strange occurrence. The voice of the sage, once noble and compassionate, now alternated unpredictably between craven and ferocious tones. Diemon's head throbbed with unbearable pain. Within this torment, he recalled the words Nahan had spoken when rescuing him.

"Did you never find it odd? The brothers and sisters who, even as their bodies shattered, devoted everything to the sage, never once contemplating escape. And now, your current state…"

"…"

"Remember the sage's abilities. In that moment, you will realize how long you've been deceived…"

With those words, Nahan lightly touched the pus-filled arm and then Diemon's trembling forehead. For a brief moment, Diemon revisited all he had done since meeting the sage in a fleeting illusion behind his eyelids.

Despite not understanding why it was strange, Diemon wept bitterly, overwhelmed by incomprehensible pain and betrayal. He had been dragged here, all this way.

And now.

Diemon thought he finally understood the meaning of Nahan's words.

His heart ached with immense betrayal and pain, yet even at this moment, his mind, seemingly not his own, whispered desires to answer the sage's call and save him. It felt as if someone else was controlling his body, moving him like a puppet, causing a chilling discomfort throughout.

Yes. This was precisely the ability of the sage, or rather, the one once called the sage.

So naturally beguiling, moving those who believed in him to his will.

Indifferent even if they moved to their deaths.

"…Ugh…!"

The realization was excruciating. As Diemon trembled and gasped for air amidst the searing pain in his head, the cries from within the room suddenly ceased.

“Is someone out there… coming to save, no, to save this person?”

“…”

“Who is it? Please, answer me. I beg you…”

The voice, feigning benevolence, now seemed utterly repulsive. However, Diemon, enlightened like Nahan before him, was no longer swayed by that voice.

Without hesitation, Diemon turned his back. He began to walk away, then paused as if struck by a sudden thought.

‘Now that I think about it…’

All this time, consumed by the desire for the sage’s love and respect, it never occurred to him that the sage too was an Awakener like him.

And to another Awakener, Diemon could steal anyone’s ability.

If he could copy the ability of a man who so easily manipulated numerous Awakeners… even in a deteriorating state, what a useful power that would be.

Diemon swallowed hard, staring at the closed door as if enchanted.

‘No. Not just copying the ability, but absorbing it to its limits, making it mine… That would be better.’

He had done this once before, with a boy who had the power to summon and control monsters. While the original bearer of the ability died in agony, Diemon found it pleasing.

To steal an ability and inflict pain before killing the adversary - what better revenge could there be? Perhaps this was the only way to compensate for

his face, hideously aged by the side effects of his power. If he took over that coveted ability and the sage died, he would be the only one in the world with such power.

He had no need to worry about revenge from the original power holder or their close associates, and the thought of becoming a new person with this power, living like a sage, made his heart pound with excitement.

Humans often delude themselves into thinking that the limits of their abilities, once reached, could be effortlessly tapped into again whenever they wished. Diemon was no exception to this. He completely forgot that he had aged significantly due to the side effects of his current powers and that he had spent over a month focusing solely on stealing the boy's ability to control monsters.

Diemon turned and walked back towards the door. The sounds of battle outside had not yet ceased.

"Time is… ample."

As he touched the door, the lock began to blur and dissolve amidst his pain. The sage had said something, thinking perhaps someone had come to rescue him, but Diemon heard none of it.

Finally, Diemon pushed open the twisted door with a bright smile on his face.

And the sage, too, burst into a bright laugh.

"Incredible, oh Diemon! You've come to rescue this man…!"

"…"

Behind the two men, each smiling with different intentions, the door, having lost its support, slowly closed.

A moment later, an indescribably horrific sound came from beyond the door, swallowed up by the noise of hail and the monsters' battle outside.

“Ha, ha….”

After what seemed an eternity, Diemon staggered out of the room, now a sea of blood. Behind him lay a corpse, its eyes wide open in a pitiful and tragic death.

‘What a resistance he put up… Such a greedy old man.’

The sage’s last moments were pathetically trivial and laughable. The middle-aged man, who had arrogantly thought too highly of himself, had screamed in front of Diemon, who was absorbing his powers and breaking his brainwashing, and later begged and cried.

Diemon touched his forehead, injured during the scuffle with the sage. His hand, covered in blood, looked much more wrinkled and skeletal than before he had entered.

Though he emerged as the victor, Diemon had aged decades compared to before he entered. He now looked even older than when Yuder had met him in his previous life.

But still, in the end, he had won.

Once he got out of here, the world would be his for the taking.

Diemon walked away, giggling happily, his legs shaking uncontrollably as he wiped off the blood.

His eyes, which were rapidly aging and clouding over, flickered as he looked for the exit, and his back bent more and more as he walked. The side effects of his powers were continuously manifesting.

Still, Diemon, unable to see his own form, did not care.

The man, chuckling in the darkness, shrank more and more. His white hair thinned, falling out in clumps, and teeth dropped behind him with each step. Growing older and older with every step, he finally shrunk to the size of a monkey. Upon discovering the back exit of the building and swallowing a breath with a bright smile, he…

Died on the spot.

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Chapter 869

A consciousness, long dormant, began to resurface slowly.

Yuder opened his eyes in the pitch-black darkness.

‘Where is this…’

He was in a space so unknown that he couldn’t tell if he was standing, sitting, or even floating in mid-air. It was a place so cold, ominous, and quiet that it was terrifying. Yuder faintly recalled having been in this space before.

Immediately, what reflexively came to mind was the afterimage of white gloves he had encountered in a place just like this.

Yuder looked around sharply, on high alert. Not far off, he spotted two pale hands.

“…”

They seemed to exist quietly, as if waiting for Yuder to become aware of them. As his gaze met them, the hands slightly moved their fingers in greeting. Yes, they were unmistakably ‘greeting’ him.

How could one think of any other meaning to the gesture of a hand standing upright with four fingers waving softly like a gentle breeze? The gesture was so reminiscent of the hand greetings Kishiar La Orr would give when he used to secretly visit Yudrain Aile, casually greeting through the window, that Yuder momentarily found himself breathless.

No words seemed adequate to describe his feelings at that moment.

‘Why am I seeing that here again? I was certain that…’

A funeral. The temple. The harsh hail. The pitch-black sky. The sage and Nahan. Battle.

A crack floating above the temple.

The red blood covering half of Kishiar's face.

The touch of his hand that drew Yuder close for support.

Memories jumbled chaotically in his confused mind, stopping at the touch of the man's hand that had wrapped around his shoulder.

Given that he could not recall anything thereafter, was Yuder Aile now unconscious? If so, was this a repetition of a dream he had before? Or was it a new dream due to the appearance of the anomalous crack?

'Probably the latter… most likely.'

Though his memory was hazy, Yuder was certain he had never seen those hands greet in such a manner before. He silently observed the two hands slowly approaching him.

Just watching them was still instinctively unsettling, but it was not as shockingly surprising as before. Even the strong, foul smell that grew more intense as they drew closer was bearable.

'It seems I've adapted to all sorts of things in life.'

The hands in the white gloves seemed to sense Yuder's change as well. The hand that had stopped right in front of him hesitated momentarily, then slowly circled around him. Yet, as Yuder remained still without showing any reaction, the air faintly trembled. As if an invisible breath were flowing, the surrounding chill deepened slightly.

However, that chill vanished abruptly as if blocked by something, right after Yuder involuntarily shivered once.

'…'

“Excuse me.”

Before the white-gloved hand could show any new movement, Yuder hesitated, then finally opened his mouth to speak. He was curious if he could make a sound, and surprisingly, his voice came out clear. It sounded muffled and didn’t travel far, as if he was speaking underwater, but it quickly faded away. Nonetheless, it was enough if only the white gloves understood him.

“What is this place? Who are you, and why are we here like this? Is this a dream or reality? Is it okay to ask why only your hands are here? I am…….”

Before he could finish his question, the approaching white glove touched Yuder’s hand, halting his inquiry momentarily. The gloved hand slowly grasped Yuder’s left hand and raised it with the palm facing upward. Enduring the goosebumps, Yuder remained still as the other hand approached and touched its index finger there.

‘There’s no point in repeating an already given answer.’

The finger moved slowly but surely, writing characters that anyone familiar with the script would recognize. Even in such an unrealistic situation, the movements were as smooth and graceful as a dance.

‘It could be either.’

‘Or neither.’

“…What does that mean?”

Yuder wondered if the meaning behind these words would have been clearer if Kishiar had been there, but with only this, he couldn’t grasp the full significance.

As he furrowed his brow in thought, the finger continued to write without pause.

Yuder followed the trajectory of the writing with his eyes, reading it laboriously in his mind.

‘You are here’

‘Because you came.’

“…I came here?”

Unable to comprehend, Yuder reflexively lifted his head and questioned back. Meanwhile, the fingers of the white glove moved swiftly.

‘So’

‘Go back.’

‘Don’t come’

‘Ever again.’

Ever again.

The finger, having finished spelling the words, pressed down on Yuder’s palm hard enough to hurt, as if punctuating a sentence. It felt as if something was binding him from that spot, making Yuder flinch. Then, the hand clenched into a fist and completely detached itself.

Suddenly, both hands came up before Yuder’s eyes - and before he could properly react, they pushed him hard in the chest, sending him tumbling backward.

It felt as though he had been floating weightlessly, but the moment he was pushed, the forgotten weight of his body became vividly apparent. As he swallowed his breath, his body, still tilted in the pushed posture, began to fall into darkness.

“Ah…”

Unlike ordinary falls, there was no wind brushing against his body in this fall. The absence of a sensation that should have been natural felt strange and eerie.

Yet, the sensation of falling was dizzyingly clear.

The white hand, frozen in the pushing gesture, quickly receded into the distance.

For a brief moment, Yuder saw something writhing in the darkness beyond the white hand.

Something he had seen somewhere before.

That was all he could think of.

"…"

Gasping, Yuder opened his eyes once more. This time, what he first saw was not the ominous darkness with a fishy smell.

As his vision, blurred at first, blinked into clarity, Yuder's eyes caught the sight of complex patterns inspired by plants and the tiny fairies adorning the edges. It was none other than the elegant ceiling of the Southern Branch of the Cavalry. The moment he realized this, the buzzing sound around him suddenly amplified, piercing his ears.

"Ah! Yuder! Mr. Yuder has awakened!"

Turning towards the source of the voice, Yuder, with still slightly fuzzy vision, recognized the familiar green hair. It was undoubtedly Lusan.

"Where!"

"What? Mr. Yuder has woken up?"

"Out of the way, you brats! You can wait! Just scram!"

After a few thuds and bangs, the curtain was roughly pushed aside, allowing a new figure to enter. Enon, looking much more haggard than the last time Yuder saw him, glared down with dark shadows under his eyes.

“…You.”

“…”

“First, you’re going to take some punishment from me.”

As Enon reached out to grab Yuder’s face, Lusan leaped in, desperately trying to stop him.

“No, Mr. Enon! No matter how angry you are, you promised to wait at least a week!”

“Someone stop the pharmacist!”

A group rushed in, indiscriminately grabbing Enon’s arms to restrain him.

Consequently, the make-shift curtain and rod surrounding Yuder’s bed collapsed, causing damage. While Yuder remained unharmed, a few of those who fell entangled in the curtain rod complained of wrist and body pains. As Lusan, unsure of what to do, poured divine power into them, Yuder realized with surprise that the chilling effects of his nightmare had completely vanished.

“Damn it… Damn. First, get those brats out. Now!”

“But these people are patients too!”

“I don’t care! If they can get better with divine power, they’re not patients to me! Get out!”

Watching Enon rage and curse, Yuder slowly swallowed his saliva a few times before opening his mouth.

“…En, on.”

“….”

His voice was more a rasp, barely louder than a whisper, but it was enough to stop Enon in his tracks. Turning sharply, Enon faced Yuder, who once again spoke through the pain in his throat.

“…Where is… Commander…”

“…”

Unsurprisingly, these words once again ignited Enon’s anger.

It was only after several minutes had passed, when the Cavalry members had been sent away and the surroundings tidied up, that they could engage in a proper conversation.

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Chapter 870

It was only after several minutes had passed, when the cavalrymen had been sent away and the surroundings tidied up, that they could engage in a proper conversation.

“What’s this about? So, you mean to say, you had another strange dream and you want to find your Commander?”

“…”

Yuder simply nodded without a word, causing Enon to shout in a voice tinged with embarrassment, his brows furrowed.

“You should have said that right away!”

What was Yuder to do when he wasn’t even given a chance to speak before Enon’s anger flared?

Nevertheless, Yuder didn’t feel any particular discontent knowing that Enon’s anger stemmed from his concern for him.

“Your Commander isn’t here right now.”

“Why?… cough cough cough.”

Just as he tried to raise his voice, a cough burst forth, feeling as though his throat would tear apart from the inside.

“Cough gently! Do you want to dislodge the ribs I’ve just set back in place? Drink this!”

Enon, clicking his tongue, immediately brought a cup of water to his lips.

“Open your mouth.”

“…No. I’ll just, with my own hands….”

“Don’t you see your arms are both sealed? Stop complaining and drink. My arm’s getting tired.”

Yuder hadn’t realized when he first woke up, but as Enon had said, both of his arms were immobilized from shoulder to wrist with splints and thick bandages, only the tips of his fingers visible. He swallowed the water flowing into his mouth, though he had doubts about the need for such extreme measures, even if divine power had been used.

The water Enon offered wasn’t clear like ordinary water. It was a deep red, brewed strongly from dried herbs, and emitted a bitter smell. But the taste wasn’t what mattered. As soon as it entered his mouth, it caused an intense burning sensation that seemed to scorch his esophagus.

It was such an unfamiliar sensation that even Yuder, who usually didn’t react to pain, momentarily flinched.

‘…Is it really safe to drink this?’

“Finish it. It’s good for you.”

“…”

Reading his hesitation, Enon, with frighteningly narrowed eyes, commanded. Ultimately, Yuder drank all the water offered by Enon. With every breath, the bitter smell lingered, and a burning sensation spread from his mouth to his stomach, causing him to exhale deeply. Enon, frowning, muttered,

“Stubborn guy. Not even a hint of nausea.”

“…Wasn’t I supposed to drink it?”

“Are you an idiot? Of course, it was a punishment. I purposely made it more effective and worse tasting. Any normal person would’ve been retching by now!”

So that was it.

Despite saying something ominous about increasing the dose next time, fortunately, Enon didn't give him any more of the unpleasant water. Placing the cup back on the table, Enon crossed his arms and sat back lazily, starting to speak.

"You didn't think your Commander would be in any better condition than you are, did you? Internally, he's a mess, even if it doesn't look like it from the outside. Isolation was necessary. Ah, but don't worry, he's not about to die. So, stop thinking about getting up and doing something. He's already regained consciousness and is working."

"…"

Yuder closed his mouth just as he was about to say that. Enon scoffed as if he had anticipated this, dismissing the idea as preposterous.

According to Enon, Kishiar had returned here immediately after everything had ended that day and had been confined to the temporary leader's office bedroom. Currently, Nathan was the only person other than Enon who could enter that floor. It seemed that even Enon had mostly just dropped off medicine and briefly checked the state without really meeting him properly.

Yuder reflexively recalled memories from the past upon realizing that it was primarily Kishiar's own decision to sever ties so completely with the outside world.

He remembered the days of Prince Kishiar's residence, which had three secret walls within the bedroom.

The door to the Kishiar's bedroom remained firmly shut, barring everyone except Nathan when the cycle approached.

'…Could it be that the cycle has come again, just like back then?'

Considering the extent to which Kishiar's abilities had been drained, leaving him in shambles internally, the possibility seemed more than plausible. It wasn't life-threatening, but Yuder wanted to be sure that Kishiar was truly alright.

“Anyway, at first, I planned to leave you there with him, but your condition was so erratic that I had no choice but to bring you here. Last night, I thought I was about to deal with your funeral. Hey, are you listening to me?”

“…Sorry. I missed that.”

Yuder, having been preoccupied with thoughts of Kishiar, admitted honestly to missing part of Enon’s words. Enon clenched his eyes shut, his fingers revealing a strong desire to grab and stretch Yuder’s cheeks, but eventually, they reluctantly retreated.

“Ha. You know…”

“…”

“Do you have any idea how many days it’s been since you passed out?”

Come to think of it, what day was it? Yuder didn’t feel particularly terrible, so he had assumed quite some time had passed since he had fainted, but he couldn’t pinpoint the exact duration.

From his previous life, the longest he had been unconscious after an injury was about a week. Of course, having spent such a period as a Cavalry commander, the consequences were severe, and since then, he had ensured not to leave a day’s gap in his duties, no matter what.

‘Last time, during the giant Pethuamet incident, it was three days… So, this time too, it must be around that.’

“…Three days?”

“Haha. Three days, you say.”

Enon replied coldly, his eyes unsmiling.

“It’s exactly two weeks today.”

“What?”

Two weeks?

Yuder’s mind momentarily froze in shock, far exceeding his expectations.

By Yuder’s sense, he had fainted after fighting alongside Kishiar, briefly encountering a hand in white gloves in a strange dream before being abruptly woken up. The perceived passage of time felt barely a day, making the reality of two weeks hard to believe. He would have never believed it if someone other than Enon had said it.

Seeing Yuder finally reacting like a patient who had properly awoken, Enon sighed.

“Now, are you ready to understand the state of your body and how I’ve treated you up to this point?”

“…”

“Whatever you saw in your dream, as a patient, you should be more concerned about your condition first. No matter how much others try to take care of you, if you don’t care for yourself, there’s nothing we can do. Do you understand what I’m saying now?”

Enon’s words were utterly true. Swallowing the shock of having lost two weeks unknowingly, Yuder quietly listened as Enon explained his condition during that time.

Yuder’s external injuries appeared almost miraculously healed, thanks to the divine power of Lusan and Enon’s medicine. However, Enon believed it best to allow a few more days for complete stabilization.

“You know the reason. Even if injuries as severe as yours seem healed, they can easily rupture again with just a slight shock. In fact, when we tried to move you here, your arm broke again just from trying to change the bed.”

“…My arm?”

“Whose arm would it be if not yours?!”

Although Yuder had no memory of such an incident, it had apparently occurred, leading to his arm being heavily splinted and bandaged for absolute stability. The external injuries could be roughly dealt with in this manner, but the real issue lay elsewhere.

“The others might not have realized, but your soul’s state was continuously in disarray. Though you had gradually improved from a similar state before, I thought this time would be the same, but…”

According to Enon, Yuder’s soul remained in a consistently poor condition throughout the period he was unconscious, unlike his physical body, which was healing. Concerned about the unchanging state of Yuder’s soul, Enon faced an unexpected situation the previous night.

“Yesterday, when I briefly left to give some medicine to the Commander, I returned to find your soul missing.”

“A missing soul means….”

“That only happens to the dead.”

“…You mean I was dead?”

However, Yuder was very much alive at the moment. There were no unusual signs, nor any unfelt pain from unseen aspects. As Yuder looked down at his own hands with a bitter expression, Enon rubbed his hair roughly, his face contorted in frustration.

“You weren’t dead. You were breathing just fine. Even the strap of the sword was properly in place, but your soul was just invisible to my eyes.”

“So, what happened?”

“I intended to call the Commander, but when I returned, your soul was visible again. Ha… You have no idea how baffling that was.”

Yuder finally understood the meaning behind Enon’s earlier statement about thinking he was dealing with a funeral. Indeed, for someone like Enon, who

could see souls, the sudden disappearance and reappearance of Yuder's soul would have been startling.

Yuder felt a renewed sense of gratitude and remorse for the troubles Enon had endured on his behalf.

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Chapter 871

Yuder felt a renewed sense of gratitude and remorse for the troubles Enon had endured on his behalf.

“…Enon. I’m sor…”

“Shut your mouth if you’re going to apologize. Understand?”

However, before Yuder could even start his apology, a sharp look from Enon sealed his lips.

“I didn’t go through all this just to hear those words. If you’re sorry, eat well, don’t get hurt like this again, and think about bowing in gratitude to your gracious big brother here.”

Enon might have said that, but Yuder knew what he truly desired wasn’t money. In his previous life, he had often received gratitude and a single lemon more than money from those to whom he gave medicine.

That was the kind of person he was, so it made sense he had picked up and treated Yudrain, who looked suspicious to anyone else, without expecting anything in return.

‘And back then, too, he preferred being treated like a big brother over money.’

Suddenly, Kishiar’s words came back to him: if you believe you’re right, don’t apologize. Though different, the sentiment in the eyes of these two, who didn’t want his apologies, somehow seemed similar.

Yuder looked at Enon’s pouting face and then smiled, looking down. Enon, as if he had seen something unbelievable, widened his eyes in shock.

“…Wait. Did you just… smile?”

“When I’m fully recovered, I’ll bow down and express my gratitude for your kindness. If that’s really okay with you.”

“…”

“And… thank you for saving me. I mean it.”

It felt a bit awkward and embarrassing to say it out loud, even if he was always sincere.

“…You’re really a damn fool.”

Enon, who had been silent, finally murmured that and then ruffled Yuder’s hair roughly before embracing his shoulders.

“You have no idea how many people were waiting for you to wake up.”

“…”

“Anyway, you’re awake now, that’s what matters. We can think about other things later. For now, just focus on getting better, okay?”

Yuder slowly nodded.

In Enon’s embrace, the sharp scent of herbs mingled with the refreshing aroma of lemons. Breathing in this scent, Yuder strangely felt both his body and eyelids growing heavy.

“…I suddenly feel sleepy. My body feels heavy.”

“Of course, you’re tired and heavy. You’ve been lying down for two weeks and just woke up.”

“…I need to see the Commander.”

“That damn Commander talk……. Sigh.”

Enon gently stroked Yuder’s head, a bit painfully, and then sighed, pushing his shoulder to lie down.

“If it’s not something urgent like one of you dying, just sleep for now. I’ll make sure you can catch up when you wake up.”

“But…”

“What ‘but’?”

“I just passed out for a moment, and it’s been two weeks. If I sleep now, I might wake up days later again… I’m worried my thoughts… my information might get blurry…”

Even with his foggy mind, Yuder tried to express his concerns, causing Enon to frown deeply.

“Hey. The world won’t end if you sleep a bit more.”

“…”

“If you forget something while sleeping, then it wasn’t that important. If you don’t wake up in a day, I’ll wake you up myself. Alright? Now just sleep!”

“…How?”

Yuder had only asked out of curiosity if there was a way to forcibly wake someone up, but this caused Enon to flare up in anger.

“Huh? Are you doubting me now? I haven’t slept properly for days keeping watch over you, and you don’t trust your big brother?”

“No. …I trust you. I do.”

It felt odd to explicitly express trust to someone. This was especially true since that someone was Enon.

After Yuder voiced his trust, there was a brief pause before Enon covered Yuder’s eyes while he was lying on a pillow with his hand.

“Then that’s settled. Close your eyes!”

Yuder reflexively shut his eyes. As he could no longer see anything, his body relaxed rapidly, like a sponge soaking up water.

Through his fading consciousness, Yuder faintly felt Enon grumbling yet carefully patting his body. He was likely doing this to reassure Yuder of his presence, even though Yuder was about to fall asleep.

‘But he doesn’t have to treat me like a child…’

Before he could finish the thought, Yuder drifted off to sleep again.

When he woke up, without having dreamt at all, it was night. The surroundings were quiet, and Enon was nowhere to be seen.

More importantly, this was not the medical room he had been in before.

‘Where is this…’

It was the bedroom connected to the temporary Commander’s office. As he realized this, a voice sounded from beside him.

“…Did you sleep well?”

Yuder’s mind, half-submerged in stupor, responded to the voice in the darkness. Turning his eyes, he saw a man sitting beside the bed.

Kishiar, with a white bandage over one eye, wearing loose indoor clothes, quietly looked down at Yuder. The sight of the bandage reminded Yuder instantly that all the battles he had been through were real.

“…”

“Should I get you some water? The pharmacist said to give you water as soon as you wake up.”

Kishiar asked, reaching for a teapot on the table. Yuder nodded, and soon the sound of water being poured was heard. Yuder tried to sit up to drink, but his movement was hindered by the bandages and splints wrapping his arms and torso.

“Ah….”

“It’s okay. Don’t rush. Take it slow. …There.”

Kishiar’s firm hand supported Yuder’s back, helping him to sit up. Through the thin layer of clothing, the cool scent of Kishiar’s skin was palpable.

The moment he sensed that familiar aroma, Yuder recalled the sinister, fishy smell from the white gloves in his dream. It was a scent completely different from Kishiar’s natural one. It was hard to believe they came from the same person, but that scent was unmistakably from Kishiar La Orr’s hands.

“Here.”

Kishiar brought the cup to Yuder’s lips. Yuder had been slightly worried it might be another of Enon’s tasteless herbal concoctions, but thankfully, this time it was just plain water. The clean water quenched a thirst he hadn’t known he had.

As he drank more urgently than he realized, Kishiar gently stroked his back, urging him to slow down.

“Don’t rush. There’s more.”

After drinking two and a half cups, Yuder finally felt sufficiently hydrated. As he leaned his head back, the man quickly and perceptively set the cup back in its place.

“…How long… have I been asleep this time?”

“Half a day.”

Kishiar’s response was short and clear.

“You regained consciousness briefly during the day, and after you fell asleep again, we moved you here. The pharmacist thought it best. As soon as you woke up, you were desperately looking for me, he said.”

“…”

“Is it true that you were so worried you wouldn’t wake up for more than a day, that you refused to sleep?”

The words were accurate, but something about the choice of words seemed off. Yuder could feel the full extent of Enon’s frustration in his expression and remained silent for a moment.

‘Enon…’

After a small sigh, Yuder opened his mouth.

“I had a strange dream while I was unconscious. I wanted to tell you about it, Commander, that’s why I was looking for you.”

“Hmm… Let me guess. Did those ‘white gloves’ appear again in your dream?”

For a moment, Yuder felt his heart leap in surprise.

“…How did you know? Could it be-”

“We didn’t share the dream.”

Kishiar interrupted Yuder’s forming question with a calm reply.

“Well, it wasn’t hard to guess. A dream so significant that you had to, and absolutely needed to find me. Considering the events that transpired before you dreamt it, the most impactful and significant thing was undoubtedly the three strange cracks that appeared above the temple.”

The man who listed these reasons slightly curved the corners of his lips in a peculiar smile.

“Given that you had a similar dream after the strange crack appeared before, it wasn’t hard to surmise that it could happen again this time. Moreover, both then and now, the common factor was that I couldn’t share your dream at all.”

“…”

“So, what was the dream this time that made you seek me out so urgently?”

“It’s about that…, rather than that…”

“…Hmm?”

Initially, Yuder had planned to immediately talk about the dream upon seeing Kishiar. However, now that Kishiar was asking about it, Yuder found himself more preoccupied with the bandage still covering his face.

The sight of just one red eye, instead of a pair, was deeply unsettling. The mere sight of it made Yuder feel as if something sharp was scraping inside his heart, an unbearable sensation.

Finally, Yuder reached out, touching the area near Kishiar’s eye. Despite the difficulty of movement due to the splints, he managed to touch his intended target with his fingertips. Even through his numb skin, the rough texture of the bandage was unmistakably felt, causing his teeth to clench involuntarily.

“Why do you still cover your eye like that?”

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Chapter 872

“Why do you still cover your eye like that?”

“Didn’t the pharmacist say forcing movement won’t help healing?”

Instead of answering, Kishiar said this while supporting the lower part of Yuder’s arm. Thanks to him bearing the weight of the heavy splint, Yuder’s burden was lessened, but his heart grew heavier.

As Yuder stopped twitching his fingers, Kishiar smoothly returned his arm to its original position.

“…”

“It’s not a serious reason. My vision hasn’t fully returned yet. I thought it less bothersome and better for protection to maintain this rather than an eyepatch.”

“Is that really all?”

“Would seeing for yourself put you at ease?”

“Yes.”

Surprised by Yuder’s decisive response, Kishiar’s eyes widened. It seemed he had not expected such an answer.

However, he soon nodded with a softened smile.

“Alright. If you wish. It’s night, so a brief moment should be fine.”

Yuder watched unblinkingly as Kishiar unwrapped the bandage himself. The face revealed between the silently falling bandages had returned to its smooth, original skin, unlike the last time he had seen it.

Soon, the golden eyelashes lifted gently, revealing the hidden pupil.

Only then did Yuder notice that the pupil in the red iris were of different sizes from the other eye. Unable to look directly this way, a scar that had not yet fully healed was faintly visible between the unfocused eye.

As Yuder clenched his teeth at this sight, the exposed eye disappeared beneath the eyelids as if it were an illusion.

“There. Now it’s done.”

Kishiar rewrapped the bandage with a tidy manner.

“The vision should return over time, but I’ve kept it covered as light isn’t good for recovery. Do you believe me now?”

Kishiar spoke casually, but Yuder couldn’t think of it so lightly.

Soft tissues like eyes or internal organs typically heal slower than other parts after treatment. Even considering this, the fact that his vision hadn’t fully returned indicated the severity of Kishiar’s injuries at the time.

The injuries were so severe that it was possible the eyelid and even the eyeball itself had been torn apart, a detail Yuder hadn’t been able to confirm due to the blood at the time.

As Kishiar said, time would heal, but it was uncertain whether the vision, durability, and healing capacity of the affected area would completely return to their previous states.

Everything comes at a cost. Healing with divine power doesn’t mean completely reversing the body’s time to pre-injury state.

The fact that Kishiar, who had never suffered a serious external injury before, had been hurt so badly while protecting him pained Yuder anew.

He had seen Kishiar in his past life fight and get injured, but it was not the same feeling as now. Back then, Kishiar had always presented a flawless front until his death, and never had he thrown himself into battle to protect Yuder like this.

Injuries that wouldn’t have occurred had he not thrown himself to save Yuder, who was sent flying upon colliding with the sword aura. The result of a choice that didn’t need to be made.

A hot, boiling sensation rose in his chest, like the moment he realized Kishiar had shielded him, igniting a fierce desire to rage and scream.

But unlike that time, Yuder couldn’t express his feelings. He realized he wasn’t the only one feeling this way.

The red pupils he faced had been fixated on Yuder’s arms from the start.

Perhaps even before Yuder had woken up, those eyes, fixed on him, conveyed emotions to him, faintly but unmistakably. Despite being unaware, Yuder felt these feelings crossing over to him.

Even being just a fraction, the sensation was so intense and vivid that it prickled his skin, carrying the exact same tempest of emotions Yuder was experiencing. It was clear through this connection that, despite appearing calm and gentle, the depths of his emotions were far from it.

It was ironic. Both were reminiscing about actions they wish they hadn’t taken, swallowing their fierce emotions while suffering from each other’s wounds.

“…”

Finding it somewhat absurd, Yuder sighed deeply, to which Kishiar responded with a dry laugh.

“It seems we’re both thinking the same thing.”

“It appears so.”

“Then let’s not dwell on such thoughts. It’s better to focus on the positive rather than suffering. Agree?”

“Some examples would make it easier, I suppose.”

“Though the past few days have been tough, restless with worry, tonight we need not worry. The wounds will heal, and we can converse, looking into each other’s eyes. A positive night, wouldn’t you say?”

“Not bad.”

“Exactly.”

Anyone listening would find the context of their conversation incomprehensible. But it eased the atmosphere.

There had been several moments like this with Kishiar, but this time it felt strangely new. The intense shift in emotions while being with him, and his natural acceptance of it all, was both strange and wondrous.

But indeed, as Kishiar said, focusing on the good was far more pleasant than being consumed by rough emotions.

Yuder leaned back into the bed, looking at Kishiar’s softened smile.

“Understood. Then I’ll remember only that I ended up like this after blocking the most powerful aura attack I’ve ever faced with just a sword. That seems like something worth boasting about.”

“Is it really something to boast about?”

“Of course.”

It wasn’t the first time Yuder had faced a swordmaster’s sword aura. But never before had a single attack rendered both of Yuder Aile’s arms useless. Not just that, the aftermath was so severe that even healing with divine power couldn’t fully restore them, to the point that they might break again with a slight touch.

Even though it was not equipped with any defense power, it was truly an incredibly powerful force. At least in this life, it seemed unlikely he would face an aura stronger than that attack, no matter how much changed.

Yuder summed up all his thoughts in one sentence.

“But, I certainly don’t want to face that aura a second time.”

“Our opinions match. I feel the same.”

Kishiar smiled.

“Well, even if we don’t want to, unpredictable events like this might happen again.”

“True. It’s a clear lesson on how different and challenging real combat can be from what we anticipate.”

Yuder felt a sense of surprise at Kishiar’s words, which seemed uncharacteristic of him.

“Therefore, you’ve become even more admirable to me. I wanted to say this as soon as you woke up, but only now do I get the chance.”

“Um… That is…”

What should he respond to such words? If someone else had said this, he would have advised them to spend their time training to ensure such an incident never happened again. But the person before him was already beyond reproach in that regard.

Honestly, in a situation like the one they had faced, it’s doubtful anyone, not even Kishiar, could have responded any better. Even Yuder himself wasn’t sure if he could have chosen a better approach.

But articulating that felt strangely awkward, as if it was already known.

‘…No, really, it’s odd. I feel a bit…’

In Yuder’s perception, Kishiar had always been a flawless entity, never once lesser than Yuder. In his past life, even with ten more years of experience, comparing himself with the current Kishiar felt more like standing shoulder to shoulder rather than overwhelming him, leaving Yuder enveloped in an unfamiliar and peculiar sensation.

Thinking about it, the present Kishiar did have over ten years less real combat experience than Yuder. After all, Kishiar had hardly any actual battle experience.

So… the statement was accurate.

‘Why do I feel so awkward about it?’

Was it because the memories of learning tactics, swordsmanship, and methods of combat engagement from Kishiar were too strong?

Eventually, Yuder, unusually at a loss for words, closed his mouth. He simply couldn’t articulate the feelings he was experiencing. Sensing why Yuder was acting this way, Kishiar didn’t press further, instead smiling quietly and changing the subject.

“So, are you not going to tell me about your dream? The one with the white gloves.”

“…I will tell it now.”

“Judging by how fervently you were looking for me, they must have said something significant, right?”

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Chapter 873

“Judging by how fervently you were looking for me, they must have said something significant, right?”

Although he could only refer to his hands as ‘they’, it wasn’t entirely incorrect. However, Yuder couldn’t help feeling a bit strange about it.

“They weren’t speaking… more like a kind of conversation.”

“A conversation? Using your fingers, as you did before?”

Yuder nodded. The inside of his palm, previously enveloped by a white glove, grew warm, tingling as if by illusion. He wanted to clench his fist to alleviate the itch, but the bandages made it impractical, so he ended up just fidgeting aimlessly.

Yuder, shifting his gaze away from his hand, took a deep breath and recounted his encounter with the white gloves in his dream. From the greetings, questions, and answers, to the final moment of being pushed and falling.

Reliving the dream didn’t feel as difficult as before. If anything, it seemed to clear his mind. After recounting the short dream, Yuder summed up all the feelings he experienced during and after the dream in a single statement.

“To be honest, after having this dream, I’m not sure if I can still call it just a dream.”

“Do you mean it felt like something that happened in reality?”

“Not exactly, but… similar. Especially after hearing Enon’s words when I woke up. Did you know? Before I woke up…”

“He said your soul suddenly became invisible. It was the first time I saw him so perplexed.”

His voice was soft, but his gaze wasn't. The red pupils looking at Yuder briefly darkened before returning to normal.

"Um… Yes. I'm still not sure why it happened, but maybe it was related to the disappearance of my soul during that time."

Kishiar slowly lowered his eyes and muttered, "Indeed."

"Are you suggesting you might have had an experience similar to those legends where souls leave their bodies to meet mysterious beings and return? The truth of such tales is uncertain, but they are indeed found in various places."

"Yes. That's the impression I had, if I had to describe it."

The presence of the white gloves in the dream was too vivid to be merely a figment of imagination. They seemed to know something Yuder couldn't comprehend and expressed their opinions more clearly than before.

Even without a mouth or a body, some things can still be conveyed through brief contact. The being, embodying all those indescribable elements, couldn't simply be dismissed as a mere dream.

Furthermore, the darkness where he had encountered the hands didn't feel like a meaningless, dark void. This impression was further confirmed by Kishiar's remarks.

"If we assume you went to a real place and returned, we should first look for clues about where that might be. Did you notice anything unusual in the darkness at the end?"

Yuder recalled the writhing black shadows behind the white gloves at the last moment. It felt familiar, but only now did he remember the answer.

"When I saw that darkness, I felt like I had seen it somewhere before. Now that I think about it… the inside of a strange crack… exactly like the one I saw before monsters poured out of it."

The ominous blackness writhed and squirmed, as if something dire was about to burst forth at any moment, churning without any discernible pattern. So dense and deep it was, that its true form, a harbinger of disaster, remained unknowable. What if this mere crack, a tiny fissure, stretched beyond its bounds to engulf the world?

Yuder felt as if what he had seen was a manifestation of that very reality.

“It might be an excessive thought, but… I can’t think of anything else that felt as similar.”

“The inside of the crack, you say. Everything eventually converges back to the existence of these cracks.”

Kishiar murmured softly.

“The first instance of that strange dream coincided with the appearance of the crack, and now again. If it’s happened twice, it might not be too far-fetched.”

“…”

“If the place was filled with the same darkness seen in the strange cracks, then it’s quite literally the inside of a crack… perhaps even beyond it?”

“The inside of a crack… you mean?”

“Yes. A mysterious place no one has ever directly seen. Known as the land of the black moon where monsters emerge.”

Despite knowing that the term ‘land of the black moon’ was just a metaphorical reference from sacred texts, Yuder’s heart raced with unease.

No one knew what lay beyond the cracks that appeared when monsters emerged, as Kishiar said. These cracks, naturally fleeting, tore open space momentarily before vanishing, barely observable by human eyes.

The strange cracks, which appeared and disappeared after a longer duration, were an anomaly, and witnessing monsters emerge from them was even

more unusual.

“It might be easier to understand if I thought of it as a place one visits briefly after death before returning.”

“Well, it might be both. Who’s to say?”

“Excuse me?”

As Yuder looked up in confusion, Kishiar spoke with a faint smile.

“The place you thought was a dream might actually be where the dead go, and at the same time, it could be the space beyond the crack. It’s not entirely implausible to consider that they might be the same place.”

This was a perspective Yuder had never considered before.

“Think about it. The existence of space beyond the cracks where monsters come through is a certainty, proven by the cracks themselves. Whether humans can reach it is unknown, but its existence is definite. Isn’t it?”

As Yuder nodded slowly, Kishiar continued.

“Separately, if there’s a space where parts of beings, long embraced by the sun, after death exist, it would be closer to an afterlife than reality. If the same darkness seen beyond the cracks existed in such a place, then the most reasonable guess in this situation would be to think that the two are the same place. Whether it makes sense or not.”

This was similar to the attitude he had shown when he said he believed Yuder was a being who had returned through time.

Even the most incomprehensible problems could yield an answer when evidence was methodically gathered and pieced together.

Even if the answer defied conventional belief, Kishiar was willing to believe it if it was the remaining conclusion.

Logically, it seemed implausible, but if that were true, then the very existence of Yuder Aile here was the most unrealistic answer of all.

Yuder, with his eyes lowered, recited some of the words written by the white gloves.

“A place that is neither reality nor dream. That’s what they said. If we go by the Commander’s words… then it would indeed be a place where all answers fit.”

“Setting aside how to get there or whether this is the correct answer, it definitely sounds like a place one would be warned to ‘not come ever again.’”

Don’t come ever again.

Yuder remembered the words emphatically written by the white gloves.

“While I can’t guarantee that I fully understand their intentions, from what I’ve heard, I don’t think they lied. They didn’t summon you there. They believe it’s not a place for you to return to. They seem to have no intention of harming you. With that in mind, the conversation might not be too difficult.”

“…”

A strange turmoil rose and then settled in his chest. Yuder bit his lip firmly.

“…Anyway, it’s certain that I didn’t go there because I wanted to. I didn’t choose to have such a dream.”

“That’s true. It would have been better if they had also told you how you ended up there.”

Kishiar reached out his hand. His touch, easing the lips he had been chewing, involuntarily relaxed him. In his crimson eyes, Yuder saw the pain he was feeling.

“Don’t be in pain. There’s no need for that.”

“…”

“I don’t know how you got there, but anyway… it’s not bad to think that you have one more ally in an unknown place, right? For me, I’m even grateful that they helped send you back here.”

How could this man show such a strong reaction to a story that should evoke more complicated emotions? Yuder didn’t understand.

But there was a strange comfort in his words, so he simply followed the gesture, took a deep breath, and closed his eyes.

“…Understood.”

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Chapter 874

The conversation that had been droning on in bits and pieces finally subsided after Yuder unknowingly fell asleep. The sight of him struggling to stay awake, his blinking slowing and his speech becoming muddled, was pitiable, yet Kishiar deliberately avoided mentioning it and continued the conversation instead.

It was not helpful at all to mention it. Instead, it was much more effective for his peace of mind to first inform him of matters he would be curious about, answer his questions, and then agree to check together when day broke.

During the two weeks Yuder had been asleep, the South had been in a state of utter chaos, as if heaven and earth had turned upside down.

At the funeral of Herne's Second Prince, the Duke of Herne was horrifically murdered. Even if the patriarch of the Herne family, who was like a ruler of the South, had died a natural death, the entire empire would have been in turmoil. But the fact that the murderer was the Duke's abandoned illegitimate child made it all the more shocking.

As a result of this incident, many, including the Duke's knights, were killed or injured. On the same day as the funeral, a strange crack occurred in the sky above the temple, unleashing numerous monsters. In the South, where snow was almost unheard of, the news that gigantic hailstones had rained down all day was nothing short of staggering.

Yet, despite all these alarming events, the people of the South were even more astonished for another reason. Despite numerous witnesses to the hellish scene of monsters pouring from the sky along with hail, shockingly, there were almost no casualties in Charloin.

The monsters that nearly engulfed the entire city were thwarted by the efforts of the Cavalry, the Imperial Southern Army, those loyal to Lady Myra El Herne, the First Princess of Herne, and the brave citizens of

Charloin who stood up valiantly. Thanks to those who fought rather than fled, Charloin miraculously survived the nightmarish night and welcomed the dawn.

In front of the astonished populace, a haggard-looking Lady Myra El Herne announced the previous day's events and promised to assist in the fastest possible recovery. The Cavalry and the Imperial Southern Army immediately expressed their support for the First Princess, and Emperor Keilusa also swiftly made a statement of support from the distant capital.

When General Gino, revered by all citizens and knights of the empire, personally testified to the truth of Lady Myra's words, and the Emperor also declared his support and assistance, the South quickly regained stability.

However, there were still challenges. The Diarca family, reacting a step too late, caused a stir by demanding a more thorough investigation into the sudden death of the Duke of Herne and the events in the South. They speculated that Lady Myra might have conspired with General Gino to assassinate the Duke, but this only backfired, inciting the ire of the Southern people.

Rumors spread among the Southern nobility that the Diarca family, after previously meddling in Western affairs, was now trying to control the South. This made it easier for Lady Myra to make her move. The rapid spread of this sentiment was largely thanks to Emperor Keilusa, who had read the Diarca's intentions and acted swiftly.

First Prince Aishes, representing the Apeto family, was conveniently ill at the time and had nothing to say. Princess Priscilla, the official heir of the Tain family, indirectly expressed her support by sending priests and supplies to the South.

The Diarca family, seeking to recover their bruised ego from the Tain Duke incident, fiercely criticized both the Apeto and Tain families. After receiving information that the assassin of the Duke of Herne was an Awakener, they even suggested that the Cavalry should be held accountable for not capturing him sooner.

However, before this opinion could fully ignite, it mysteriously fizzled out when the Diarca family suddenly fell silent for reasons unknown. This change began shortly after a secret letter from Kiolle da Diarca, dispatched to the South, reached the Duke of Diarca.

The fact that Kishiar, who shouldn't have known about the letter's existence in the first place, was aware of it, was simple. Emperor Keilusa had been keeping a close watch on the Duke of Diarca's movements with his own abilities.

The Emperor knew both that the Crown Prince had left the palace and that the Duke of Diarca was unaware of this fact. Nevertheless, he cunningly leaked his own news without any outward indication, causing confusion for the wily old Duke. The longer it took for the Duke to learn of the Crown Prince's absence, the more advantageous it was for the Emperor.

Indeed, this strategy proved effective. Upon receiving the letter from his youngest son, the Duke of Diarca, after sending people to the resplendent Bright Palace where the Crown Prince should have been, was seized by immense shock and rage. The problems at his own doorstep were too pressing to concern himself with others.

Regardless of what the Diarca family said or did, Myra prioritized wrapping up all affairs to secure her position as Duchess. She postponed the Duke of Herne's funeral, and denounced and dismissed those forces, including the lord of Charloin, who did not come forward. However, she spared those who had criticized her but had helped Charloin on the day of the hailstorm.

Following this process, most people and nobles of the South, despite their fierce jockeying for position, outwardly turned to support Myra.

The fact that the illegitimate child who killed the Duke of Herne and then disappeared was not an ordinary person but an Awakener hostile to nobles and non-Awakeners, and that he had fought and caused internal strife with another Awakener of differing views on that day, was relatively overlooked amid these events.

The possibility of the Awakener’s image being changed due to incidents related to the Star of Nagran was averted thanks to the blade that nearly turned against the Cavalry being broken.

Kishiar, who spent most of his days sleeping and barely managed to wake up and gather his senses, received reports of all these events only from Nathan Zuckerman. Even with him lying down, his dependable adjutant, the Cavalry, General Gino, and the distant Emperor were enough to support him.

He relayed these stories succinctly to Yuder. Yuder, despite struggling to keep his sleepy eyes open, listened intently, learning about the efforts of those who had supported them and how they had eagerly awaited his awakening. Kishiar remembered every flicker of indiscernible emotion in Yuder’s eyes as he heard of their struggles not ending in failure.

Of course, what reassured Yuder the most was information related to Kishiar’s current condition. His vessel’s condition was, in truth, in such a state that it was difficult to even falsely claim it was fine. However, he had not yet suddenly entered a cycle or a mating period. The reasons he chose to isolate himself in his bedroom were twofold.

The first was because his need for sleep had drastically increased, possibly due to his vessel being squeezed to its limits for the first time. The second was to stabilize his highly sensitive and tense nerves, reminiscent of the severe pain from when his vessel had been cracked.

In other words, while he knew in his mind that it was unlikely, he isolated himself out of concern that he might accidentally hurt someone with his uncontrolled power if he made contact with others.

Kishiar did not mention that within the category of ‘others,’ Yuder Aile naturally occupied the largest portion.

Despite his aversion to being confined, Kishiar found a bitter smile forming on his lips at the realization that in the face of familiar pain, the most familiar and stable environment was what brought peace to his mind.

Kishiar gazed intently at the sleeping Yuder’s face. The dark veins that had once marred his pale complexion had thankfully almost disappeared. However, the areas around his abdomen, which had been enshrouded in a spreading darkness, still bore the last traces of darkness.

Yuder, upon waking, did not seem to feel any physical pain. But Kishiar knew that the body Yuder was unaware of could be suffering in ways unknown. After all, Yuder was someone who endured considerable pain without a single complaint.

Gently grasping the fingertips peeking out from thick bandages, Kishiar felt a faint warmth. Yuder’s ungloved fingers, toughened with calluses and faint scars, were not conventionally beautiful. However, to Kishiar La Orr, they were far more beautiful than his own unscarred, smooth hands.

The hand that held Yuder’s fingers reluctantly moved up to his wrist, then to his forearm, and slowly caressed the bandages wrapped around his shoulder. Unbeknownst to Yuder, every time Kishiar briefly awoke and came to visit him, he sat by his side, holding his hand and carefully stroking over the bandages. This touch, neither to infuse divine power nor out of fear of causing pain, was always careful yet never ceased.

It was almost like a sacred ritual, the way he repeated these gentle caresses. Suddenly, a shadow cast by the dim moonlight appeared at the doorway. It was none other than Nathan Zuckerman.

“…”

Upon recognizing who was with his lord, Nathan smartly refrained from speaking aloud and instead bowed his head in greeting. The ensuing conversation was soft and faint, just enough not to reach Yuder’s ears, a conversation befitting swordmasters.

“The pharmacist has sent the medicine for Baron Aile and the Duke.”

“Thank you. Leave it there. Don’t come closer, or he might wake up again.”

“Did Baron Aile just wake up?”

“Yes.”

“…That’s good.”

For the first time, genuine concern slipped through the usually stoic adjutant’s words. Kishiar wondered what kind of expression Yuder would make if he knew this.

Kishiar’s lips faintly curled up, then relaxed again.

“Have you found any traces of Nahan?”

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Chapter 875

“Have you found any traces of Nahan?”

As the question was posed, the once gentle expressions on the faces of the two men vanished simultaneously. It was Nathan Zuckerman who, with an impassive face, opened his mouth to respond.

“Yes. Based on the information relayed by Deputy Commander Wand, we searched the desert areas near three sectors. And today, at a place called ‘Entrance of the Sunset,’ we found this.”

What Nathan pulled out from his bosom was a dirty piece of cloth. It appeared to be part of a garment, now so blackened with discoloration that its original color was indiscernible. Kishiar’s red eye, not hidden by his bandages, narrowed sharply and scrutinized the object meticulously.

“It smells of dried blood. Is it not one but two pieces of cloth stuck together?”

“Yes. One seems to be part of a sleeve of a shirt, and the other, a bandage that was attached to it. Both were soaked in blood and sand.”

“What did Kanna say about it?”

“She asserted it belonged to that person. However, there was hardly any new information to glean, making it unclear what might have happened to him.”

“I see… I guess so.”

Kanna Wand had earned recognition on the night known as ‘Hail Night,’ successfully leading the Cavalry with Ever and safely evacuating many non-Awakener individuals. Among them were Kiolle da Diarca and the Crown Prince. However, despite her achievements, she could not rejoice, as she had failed to properly manage the prisoner Hosanna.

This was the case not only for Kanna but also for every member who had directly or indirectly contributed to Hosanna's escape that day. While Kishiar was unable to meet them, the gravity of the incident was too severe to delay disciplinary actions.

Issues must be addressed at the moment they arise. Delaying makes moving forward much more difficult. In this case, he believed there was a significant risk of the members' morale and motivation deteriorating and becoming corrupted.

Therefore, Kishiar, bedridden, dealt with the disciplinary actions through written orders. His method was straightforward. He asked those who had admitted their faults to write down their wrongdoings and what they thought could be done to prevent a recurrence of such incidents.

The focus was not on punishment for the crimes committed but on finding solutions. He did not expect the members to understand the significance of this immediately, but that was irrelevant. As expected, the members interpreted it as 'write the punishment you think you deserve.' After reading their papers, clumsily filled with their thoughts on the heaviest penalties and their painstakingly written solutions, Kishiar made some deductions and additions before sending them back.

In the case of Kanna Wand, her original proposed punishment included a ten-year forfeiture of her salary, demotion from her Deputy Commander position, and taking lifelong responsibility for the issues caused by Hosanna.

Kishiar accepted the lifelong responsibility and reduced the salary forfeiture to one year, but he did not agree to remove her from the Deputy Commander position.

Since then, Kanna had not rested for a moment, continually working hard. Thanks to her efforts in thoroughly investigating and organizing the events of Hail Night, the Cavalry remained stable even in the absence of their Commander and his assistant.

Without her, no one would have understood the bizarre circumstances behind the deaths of the sage and Diemon discovered after Hail Night.

A cold smile briefly lingered on Kishiar's lips as he thought about their deaths.

'Truly a death befitting each of them.'

Until the very end, the sage, who had clung to hope and thought to escape by brainwashing a Cavalry member or another, met a miserable death at the hands of the Diemon he had exploited. Consumed by revenge and greed, Diemon, whose body had aged rapidly due to ability overload, withered away even further, dying unnoticed in an instant.

The one who dreamt of obtaining everything through his brainwashing ability, and the copyist who, having stolen that power, dreamt of his own success.

Kishiar surmised that similar events must have occurred in the 'previous game.'

"It's highly likely that the Diemon in that game succeeded because he chose not to fully absorb the true sage's power, stopping at an inferior copy."

Yuder had mentioned that the sage he met in the previous game possessed not a perfect brainwashing ability, but rather one that could merely alter people's moods. If it was an inferior copy, it made sense that he could only use it to that extent.

That brief moment of choice spared Diemon's life, and the future Yuder had feared was thus altered.

Why and how did such a difference arise? While uncertain, considering Yuder's story and the information Kanna deciphered, it was possible to speculate where the variables in this game began.

"Perhaps… it was all due to Yuder."

Long ago, Yuder went to the East to search for the missing Devran and met Nahan for the first time - an encounter that never happened in the previous game. As a result of this meeting, the existence of Nahan and the Star of Nagran was revealed much earlier to the Cavalry, changing the sage's movements to be quicker and bolder than before.

Unlike the previous game, the real sage on the Crown Prince's and Duke Diarca's side used Diemon's ability to perfectly copy the power of a young Awakener. His goal was to attack the Sun Palace, where the Emperor resided, to make a significant impression on Duke Diarca.

As a result, Diemon realized that his ability was not just inferior copying; with a price, he could perfectly acquire them.

Was it too speculative to think that this experience influenced his life-deciding choice in this game? Kishiar concluded that it probably wasn't.

With this, the greater enemy of the future Yuder feared was no longer a concern. However, since Nahan, who should have died in the previous game, disappeared, and the strange cracks appeared much earlier than Yuder remembered, it couldn't be said that everything turned out well.

Knowing this, Yuder must have struggled on the day of the hailstorm, sparing no effort to reduce the variables, even at the expense of his own body.

"…"

Kishiar could not fully comprehend the weight of the future Yuder knew. How could he claim to understand the resolve to prevent a repetition of the past, a determination so fierce that even injuries that shattered his entire body seemed inconsequential?

Yet, whenever Kishiar's greed for Yuder's safety inevitably grew, he recalled a dream he once had.

Petals fluttering under a blue sky. In stark contrast, the bloodied body of a prisoner, unable to move.

The eyes revealed beneath the helmet of a soldier dragging the prisoner like an animal, and the face reflected in the blade.

In that horribly disfigured face, a single eye, still dark as night, revealed the identity of the prisoner to Kishiar like a bolt of lightning.

Every time he recalled that dream, Kishiar became acutely aware of the trivial weight of his own greed. This realization deepened after he learned Yuder's secret.

"Hmm…"

In the midst of these thoughts, Yuder slightly furrowed his brow and made a sound. Kishiar immediately straightened his posture and banished the thoughts he had been dwelling on.

'Darn it. Did my deep contemplation inadvertently get transmitted?'

The fact that emotions could unintentionally be conveyed to the other due to their connection was inconvenient at times. After Yuder had once caught a glimpse of the emotions Kishiar thought he had perfectly concealed, Kishiar made an effort not to dwell on negative emotions for long.

Yuder was indifferent to the pain in his own body but sensitive to the emotions Kishiar felt.

'Anyway… The discovery of what is presumed to be Nahan's clothes and bandages is hardly good news for us.'

Yuder speculated that Nahan was not dead but had been transported somewhere by Hosanna's last ability. Kishiar, considering this possibility as a priority, had ordered Kanna to investigate.

The place where Hosanna died was a grim sight, soaked with burst blood and bodily fluids. Undeterred, Kanna entered the cavity left behind multiple times, using her ability to extract information.

The scarce information she managed to glean was related to the last words mumbled by Hosanna.

In his final moments, Hosanna reminisced about a certain Southerner he had met in his youth. There had been a peculiar person who asked him to convey a message: if his young master ever wanted to visit the South, he should come to a specific place. Hosanna suspected that this person might have been related to Nahan's mother, but he never told Nahan and kept silent for a long time.

Facing death, he thought of the quickest way to reach that place and used his teleportation ability on Nahan.

The desert between the South and the Empire. Towards one of the midlands where Hosanna had crossed as a child with the caravan.

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Chapter 876

Even in the most hostile of nations, as long as trade is not entirely forbidden, clandestine exchanges between civilian merchants are an inevitable occurrence. For the merchants of the Southern Lands to travel north of the desert, they must cross it unless they use ships, a journey fraught with danger and not easily undertaken without considerable preparation.

The midlands served as secret rest and resupply points, carved out over many years by these merchants. Scattered across the vast desert, several such areas existed. Some were known even to the people of the Empire, but most were kept and managed solely within certain Southern merchant circles. Knowledge of these shortcuts, where monsters rarely appeared, was as valuable to the Southern merchants as the goods they traded.

Nathan Zuckerman took over the search for Nahan when it became clear that even with Kanna's information, the location of the midland he passed through was uncertain. Traveling alone, without accompaniment, he scoured the desert's edge for days until he finally discovered Nahan's belongings.

"Nathan. You must already know about the merchant group managing that midland called the 'Entrance of the Sunset', right?"

"Yes. Anman Noon… In the Imperial tongue, it translates to 'Owl's Wing Merchant Group'. An old and renowned organization, they seem well-known in that region. The owner isn't just an ordinary merchant but belongs to a prestigious family in the South. That's probably why a single merchant group could own an entire midland."

"The Owl's Wing, then. It's likely they took Nahan from there."

"The chances are higher that they disposed of a suddenly deceased body rather than taking a living person."

“In this situation, the likelihood doesn’t matter. You know that.”

Consider Hosanna. On the brink of exhaustion, rampage, and death, he managed to send Nahan to the desert, achieving what everyone deemed impossible. Awakeners can make the impossible possible, and so could Nahan.

“Prioritize the possibility that he’s alive in your investigation. Also, find out which region of the South the owning family of the merchant group is based in.”

“Understood.”

The base of the merchant group was likely Hosanna’s intended final destination for Nahan. This meant the mysterious Southerners searching for Nahan might be there as well.

Whether they were related to Nahan’s birth mother or not was now irrelevant. The only thing that mattered was whether Nahan somehow survived or died.

Nahan knew too much from this battle. He learned of Kishiar’s past memories, read the important memories of the core members of the Cavalry, and even discovered information about the ‘previous game’ of Yuder Aile.

Kishiar thought his own memories being read were relatively unimportant. Even if they contained significant events, most were things of the past, with little influence on the future.

However, Yuder’s memories and the visions they might have sparked were different. They contained information that, if acted upon, could turn the entire world upside down.

If someone who knew all this survived and crossed into the South, Kishiar dared not speculate what might follow. That’s why it was crucial to ascertain Nahan’s fate, at all costs.

With these thoughts, Kishiar lifted his deep-set eyes.

“Nathan. Next time, it would be wise to take Kanna, Elle, and Nipollen with you, instead of going alone.”

“Nipollen? You mean the cat boy?”

For the first time, the knight, who rarely showed blood or tears in front of anyone but his lord, furrowed his brow and hesitated.

“I’ve never heard that the desert climate is bad for cats, but it might still be dangerous.”

“Let it be as it has been until now, with you handling everything alone. The reason for sending the other three is to see if there might be other Awakeners among the merchants who own that midland.”

Nathan Zuckerman’s expression changed slightly as he surmised the implication of the other Awakeners’ reaction from his lord’s thoughts.

“Understood. I can’t instantly recognize other Awakeners on sight, but it’s certainly worth investigating.”

“Yes. And now there’s more to ask Aton, who’s underground.”

“You should still rest. Please take it easy with Baron Aile.”

Kishiar, momentarily taken aback by the unexpected advice, pressed his lips together and let out a softened smile.

“To hear you say such things, I’ve certainly lived to see a lot.”

“I’ll make sure to handle everything you’ve entrusted to me while you rest.”

“Good. Just don’t overexert yourself. You hardly need sleep, but you’re still healing from that injury.”

Kishiar’s gaze shifted to Nathan Zuckerman’s arm. During the Hail Night, Nathan had stealthily moved around, saving many with his sword, but had

been bitten on the arm by a monster. Though a swordmaster, he was not invincible. That wound meant a moment so dire that had Nathan not intervened, someone else would have died in his place.

What would have been a fatal injury for an ordinary person was merely a tooth mark for Nathan Zuckerman, treated with ointment and a simple bandage, barely noticeable under clothing. Kishiar hoped his adjutant would not prioritize duty over recovery.

Nathan glanced nonchalantly at his arm where his lord's gaze lingered and bowed in gratitude.

"Thank you for your concern, but the wound has almost healed, and I've resumed training. I must stay healthy to serve you for a long time."

With that, he turned and left, disappearing as silently as he had arrived, leaving just two people in the room.

Kishiar chuckled softly, musing over Nathan's words.

"What a reassuring thing to say…"

The resolve not to become a burden and to take care of himself for his lord was evident. Such words, not usually spoken by him, must have been influenced by Yuder's recent injuries and actions.

Looking down at Yuder's pale face lying beside him, Kishiar exhaled.

The thought of someday hearing Yuder say the same seemed extravagant at the moment. But imagining it was surely harmless.

Kishiar secretly set it as a small goal in his heart to hear such words from Yuder someday. In fact, there were quite a few goals related to Yuder etched in his mind.

Although some dreams are known to be unattainable, people continue to dream them, knowing the joy they would bring if they ever did come true.

Yuder’s hope for an early awakening was not fulfilled, but his wish to rest deeply and wake up refreshed, unlike during his time in the West, seemed somewhat realized.

Then, what about Kishiar La Orr from the previous game?

Did he, too, project dreams onto Yuder’s sleeping face, silently laying them there like the present him?

Were these dreams so heavy and profound that, even in death, they lingered, lurking in the darkness, unable to vanish completely?

‘The pharmacist said my soul is normal. So, this being isn’t a part of my current self.’

Yet, Yuder was certain that this entity was another Kishiar. Even though Kishiar had only heard stories, he could distinctly feel his own identity.

It was a different feeling from what Yuder directly experienced and sensed. From deep within his instincts, Kishiar understood this through the attitudes and actions shown to Yuder, and the way answers to questions were interpreted - all too clearly.

‘Figuring out how to explore this… that’s the crux of it now. It would be nice if it not only reached out to Yuder but came to me as well.’

The thought of meeting another version of himself could have been chilling, but there was no such hint in Kishiar’s eyes. His shadow, lost in thought while gently stroking Yuder’s arm, remained cast in the same place until almost dawn.

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Chapter 877

Yuder’s eyes snapped open as he abruptly sat up. He seemed to have been conversing with Kishiar, but when he came to his senses, the sun was already high in the sky.

‘I must have fallen asleep at some point.’

He was perplexed, but nonetheless, he felt considerably lighter and not in a bad mood compared to when he had last woken up. Yuder turned his head to look for Kishiar. He found him asleep in a bed a short distance away. Yuder would have been extremely worried if Kishiar was still vigilantly guarding him, but seeing him resting peacefully eased his mind.

‘Since I’m up first for once, it wouldn’t be bad to check on his condition this time.’ Yuder thought, stepping down from the bed. He sighed shortly, annoyed by the splints wrapped around his arms.

‘Isn’t it time to remove these if they don’t hurt anymore?’

His arm had surely healed. Although there had been an incident where it re-broke while he was unconscious, Yuder felt that such an occurrence was unlikely to happen again.

‘It seems my strength has fully returned as well.’

The strength that had been drained to its limits had surprisingly replenished itself during the two weeks he had been asleep. Moreover, Yuder felt that the total amount of strength accumulated in his body had increased compared to before.

‘It seems like I broke through some unknown limit with the power of the Red Stone… Is that why?’

The power of the Red Stone within Yuder had always surged through his veins, starting from his hand whenever he exerted strength. Initially, it had

only reached up to his shoulder, but since the incident in the west, it had spread to his face and chest. Now, he wondered how far it had extended. The memory of the immense power that had once fiercely resonated deep within him at a crossroads of decision lingered vaguely in his mind.

‘I should check.’

The first and second time he had regained consciousness, dealing with Enon and Kishiar was overwhelming enough that he hadn’t had the chance to examine his own body. But now it was different.

First, he wanted to free himself from these bandages and splints, check on Kishiar, and then take a refreshing bath.

Sigh.

As Yuder exhaled shortly and closed his eyes, a thin stream of wind blew gently, wrapping around his arms. Simultaneously, the bandages and splints binding his arms were sliced away as if cut by a sharp blade.

Yuder flexed and unfurled his now free hands several times. Indeed, there was no pain anymore.

Approaching Kishiar’s bed, which was dimly lit due to the half-drawn curtains blocking the light, he noticed a familiar-smelling incense burning. The incense, releasing wisps of smoke like mirages, sat on a tray engraved with intricate, complex patterns.

‘That incense seems familiar, and the tray appears to be an unusual artifact. Could it be a magic tool?’

Though it seemed like a magic tool, its exact nature was unclear. However, Yuder soon remembered the identity of the incense. It was the same kind he had seen burning in Kishiar’s bedroom during a break he had taken after an experiment accident involving Thais Yulman.

Wasn’t it an incense said to bolster one’s energy? Kishiar didn’t seem to think much of its usefulness, but seeing the same here, perhaps a

subordinate who deeply cares for their lord brought it.

Who else would go to the trouble of transporting such a non-essential item for Kishiar’s sake, if not Nathan Zuckerman?

Kishiar still had a bandage wrapped around one of his eyes. His face, lying in profound stillness as if he barely breathed, appeared more like a piece of art than a person unless one listened very closely.

Yuder moved with utmost care to avoid making noise, yet Kishiar remained undisturbed despite Yuder’s close approach. It was a rare occurrence.

‘It must mean his body is still not in good shape.’

Looking down at his paler than usual cheeks, a deep ache welled up inside Yuder’s chest. After hesitating for a long time, Yuder slowly reached out his hand toward the disheveled golden hair on Kishiar’s smooth forehead. His aim was a strand of hair that seemed to irritate its owner by sticking near the eye.

After gently moving it aside, a breath he had been holding back escaped thinly.

“Huuu…”

Kishiar was still not awake. Yuder wished to use his power to check Kishiar’s internal condition right then. But such actions should not be taken impulsively, as he had done previously. A thorough assessment of his own condition was necessary first.

Thinking he would end up staring all day at that face like an infatuated fool if he continued to watch, Yuder reluctantly lowered his eyes and turned his head away.

Then, he suddenly realized something he hadn’t thought strange until now. ‘I thought the bed curtains were only half-drawn for some reason… but now that I see it…’

If the intention was to block out light and sleep, drawing the curtains fully would have been proper. However, the curtains over Kishiar's bed were only half-closed. While approaching, Yuder hadn't noticed anything odd, but as he was about to leave, he realized that from this spot, his own bed was clearly visible.

So, Kishiar had deliberately left the curtains on that side undrawn to keep an eye on Yuder's bed. Thanks to this, Yuder could immediately spot Kishiar upon waking.

It seemed like a trivial matter, but this realization stirred an unbearable emotion in Yuder.

"…"

Kishiar, in his slumber, was unknowingly painted vividly in Yuder's mind.

"…"

During the two weeks Yuder had been asleep, and the brief encounter they had last night upon waking, had Kishiar been yearning for Yuder all this time? Had he only half-closed the curtains so he could see Yuder at any moment, and thus had been lying there, watching?

Though a short yet long period had passed, the feelings Kishiar showed Yuder had always been consistently the same. They were not apparent at first glance but became painfully clear once he turned his back.

These emotions were beyond words. Perhaps.

After bathing, Yuder dressed in the clothes that seemed prepared for whenever he might wake and opened the door leading away from the bedroom, heading to the opposite office. Just then, a familiar back of the head caught his eye.

With rose-red hair and a tall stature, Yuder quietly approached and tapped him on the shoulder.

"What are you doing? Are you fully recovered?"

“Hm? Haha. Of course. I’ve been fine for a while… Yuder?!”

Gakane turned his head with a laugh, then suddenly let out a yell as if he had seen something unbelievable.

‘I’ll go deaf at this rate.’

“What?! Yuder, how are you here?”

“Obviously, because I woke up.”

“When?!”

“Just now.”

“What? But are you sure you should be moving around already? What about your arm? Your leg?”

Gakane seemed to have misunderstood Yuder’s mention of having just woken up. Yuder let out a short sigh and shook his head.

“I’m fully healed. I just slept a bit longer, there’s no problem with my body, so relax.”

“But still…”

“Where’s Enon? In the infirmary?”

“Yeah, yeah. If you mean the pharmacist, he should be in the infirmary as usual… You’re going there?”

“I have to. Enon will be angry if I don’t visit right after waking up.”

It seemed Gakane finally accepted that Yuder was indeed in good health.

“So, you really are better…”

Would Yuder really be wandering around if he wasn’t fully healed? He had the judgment to know better than that.

Yuder, with a bewildered Gakane in tow, headed to the infirmary. Along the way, everyone they encountered reacted as if they had seen a ghost at the sight of Yuder, either falling over in shock or screaming, leaving Yuder's ears almost deaf by the time they arrived.

"My goodness, Yuder is out!"

"It's Yuder!"

"Yuder…! Are you really all better? Truly?"

Many of them, just like Yuder had been until recently, still had protective braces on various parts of their bodies. There were quite a few with gauze on their faces or leaning on canes. Even though they had been treated with divine power, they still needed to be cautious of aftereffects.

Yet, their faces all looked vivid and bright. The memory of blood spilled and lives lost during the hailstorm seemed to have been conclusively dealt with by the Cavalry in Yuder's absence.

Could it be that no one harbored any resentment towards Yuder Aile for failing to stop Hosanna and losing Nahan? This fact felt somewhat strange, and the strangeness only amplified the peculiarity Yuder felt in accepting all of this.

How could everyone smile so brightly, knowing that it all wasn't over yet?

Yuder slowly extended his hand in response to an imperial special forces soldier reaching out to shake his hand with a bandaged finger, his smile full of relief. Watching the group from the Star of Nagran and other candidates rushing towards him in excitement, Yuder briefly recalled the fighting arena where he first encountered them, then quickly pushed the memory away.

Even Elpkins among them, despite his large size, shed small tears like a child, letting out a childlike sob.

"I'm so relieved… They said you were in a coma for over two weeks… I thought…"

“…”

Yuder felt awkward, but Gakane’s eyes reddened as if understanding his emotions. By the time they reached the infirmary, the crowd following them had grown so large it almost filled an entire corridor.

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Chapter 878

“What’s going on? How many times must I say that the area around the infirmary should be quiet? Why is it so noisy outside?!”

Yuder had wondered how to get rid of the stubborn people who refused to leave, but fortunately, the situation resolved itself in a different way. Before he could even open the door from this side, Enon burst out with a fierce expression, his eyes locking directly with Yuder’s.

“You…”

“…I felt better, so I came down myself.”

“This…”

Enon’s gaze swept over Yuder’s face, his unbandaged arm, and the humans around them.

“This… madman! Who let him come down here on his own feet!”

A terrifying shout echoed through the entire corridor, instantly chilling the previously emotional atmosphere. The members who had been awkwardly exchanging glances suddenly pretended not to know each other and began to back away one by one.

“Ah… now that I think about it, I forgot I was supposed to go help with the repairs…….”

“I’ll go with you!”

“Oops. I have to go down to the basement for a patrol change! Regrettably, I can’t stay here any longer…….”

“Goodness. Can’t be late. Better hurry along.”

Their ability to shamelessly escape was impressive, befitting members of the Cavalry. Even the sincere candidates like Elpkins, who had been tearfully genuine before, had long since retreated far faster than before.

“Mr. Yuder. I need to help with the temple repairs, so I must go. It’s really fortunate to see you awake. See you next time!”

“…”

Before Yuder could say a word, Elpkins hastily bid farewell, clearly avoiding Enon, and scampered off. Feeling a hand on his shoulder, he turned to see the only person left beside him, Gakane, with a sigh-laden smile. The surprise he initially felt had completely vanished, replaced by a calm acceptance.

“Yuder. I’m properly apologizing to the pharmacist. I’ll go get the lemons in your place.”

“…”

“Pharmacist, thank you for your hard work today. Yuder didn’t look ill, but he insisted on seeing you first thing after waking up. Please take that into consideration.”

Enon’s habit of devouring fresh lemons was now a well-accepted oddity within the Cavalry. It was no longer a secret known only to Yuder that he had a peculiar fondness for lemons.

Yuder looked at Gakane, who had cleverly extricated himself from the situation while still finding a way to help, with a mix of astonishment and admiration. His already exceptional social skills had evolved further with experience.

“…Is that true?”

“What is?”

After Gakane had left, Enon asked coldly.

“Is it true that you had to see me as soon as you woke up?”

“It’s true.”

Why else would he have come all this way? Enon looked at Yuder with a strange expression, then irritably brushed his hair back, muttering to himself.

“Ha. Well… It’s a relief that at least one of the crazy people like you has some sense. How long are you going to stand there? Come in already!”

It seemed Gakane’s words had had a significant calming effect. Enon’s previously sharp gaze softened as he gestured with his head for Yuder to follow.

Entering the infirmary behind Enon, he saw other guests. The mages Hellem and Alik, sitting with Lusan, looked surprised as they saw them.

“Yuder?!”

“Sir Yuder? Have you come yourself? What about your bandages!”

“I was wondering why it was so noisy outside… now it makes sense.”

While Hellem nodded, understanding the reason for the commotion, Enon with a simple gesture of his head restrained Alik and Lusan, who were about to rush over.

“Let’s exchange greetings later. I need to check on this guy first. And you know that the promised time has already passed, right? Don’t nag me no matter what I do.”

“Ah… Aaah……. Yes, I understand.”

Lusan looked at Yuder with a somewhat pitiable gaze, then shook his head in disbelief. Yuder passed them and entered a small room that seemed to be Enon’s private space.

As the door closed, Yuder braced for an attack from Enon, but surprisingly, Enon silently motioned him to sit in a chair.

“Sit there.”

“…You’re not going to do anything?”

Yuder asked out of pure curiosity, but Enon grimaced in response.

“Stop making weird remarks when I’m trying to be patient. If you have such tastes, confess them to your Commander. He’d probably dance with joy no matter what you ask of him!”

Expecting his cheeks to be pinched, Yuder was relieved.

“Take off your shirt. I need to check your arm.”

Without a word, Yuder removed his shirt. The sight he had seen while washing earlier unfolded once again.

The arm, once fractured and now healed, looked perfectly normal, almost unbelievable. The chest, also heavily bandaged like the arm, appeared the same.

However, the abdomen was different. Yuder stared at the dark red veins spreading out from his navel. They resembled the marks that had spread on his hand since the day he was hit by the energy from the Red Stone.

Frankly, it wasn’t a pleasant sight. But it didn’t hurt at all now.

When Yuder first saw it, he felt less shocked and more like something inevitable had arrived. During the excruciating pain of breaking his body’s limits and making a ‘choice,’ he had sensed that some physical consequence would inevitably remain. If such a trace was left while he recovered stronger than before, it was, in fact, milder than expected.

‘Well. I still can’t be sure how this will affect my body in the long run…’

Enon, with his bright yellow eyes, carefully examined Yuder's body, pressing and watching for any reaction.

"Does it hurt?"

"No. Not at all."

"Your strength?"

"I think it's fully recovered."

Honestly… it felt like not only had he recovered, but his strength had increased beyond its previous level. But he chose not to mention that for now.

"Still, why did you remove the bandages on your own?"

"It was hard to get up… and too constricting."

"If you remove them again without permission, you'll really be in trouble next time."

It seemed like he was already half in trouble, but there was no need to provoke Enon further with that statement. After a long inspection, Enon finally withdrew his hand.

"Put your clothes back on."

The fact that meticulous Enon had nothing to say after a thorough check meant that he didn't consider Yuder a patient anymore. This was very fortunate. Enon didn't seem too upset either.

"I didn't expect you to be this lively just a day after waking up… Anyway, it seems you don't need splints anymore. But don't get too excited and misuse your body. Make sure you eat your meals and take your medicine on time."

"Okay."

Enon handed Yuder the medicine himself. It was the same bitter-tasting herbal infusion and pills that Yuder had consumed immediately upon waking the previous day, or perhaps even more bitter. The strange sensation of his whole body feeling numb just from consuming it hadn't yet become familiar… but what could he do.

Only after Yuder had finished taking the medicine did Enon's furrowed brow finally relax almost completely.

"Did you talk to your Commander?"

"I did."

"Why didn't he come with you?"

"While we were talking, I fell asleep first. When I woke up, the Commander was also asleep, so I just came here."

Yuder said, then hesitated for a moment before speaking again.

"Yesterday, I couldn't explain properly, but in my dream, I experienced something similar to what I had dreamt before… Maybe it was a continuation of that."

Yuder went on to describe in more detail the white-gloved hand he saw in his dream and the conversation he had with it. Enon listened silently to Yuder's words, without asking any questions.

"I was thinking, while talking with the Commander, maybe the moment you felt my soul had disappeared was when I had that dream."

It might have seemed like an abrupt change of subject, but the main reason Yuder wanted to see Enon right away was to share this thought.

"The Commander said that place could be the afterlife or something related to the crack. Or maybe both. Regardless of whether such a thing is possible… can a soul really go somewhere and then return? What do you think?"

This question had no other recipient but Enon, who could see souls, unlike Yuder, who had never perceived or seen a soul.

“I had guessed that you might have had a similar dream when you kept making a fuss yesterday… Your Commander’s speculation is quite bold.”

Enon’s initial response was more composed than expected.

“Just because I can see souls doesn’t mean I know where humans go after death. However… I know someone who was very interested in that.”

“Who is that?”

“Luma.”

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Chapter 879

Suddenly, the atmosphere sank heavily, like in water. Enon, with an unreadable expression, broke the silence.

“Luma was quite interested in the existence of souls and their relationship to the physical body. Looking back, what emerged from that research was, in fact, me.”

“…What?”

Caught off guard, Yuder’s mind came to a halt. Witnessing his rare display of astonishment, Enon sighed.

“It’s a bit problematic if this gets out, but it’s not that big of a deal.”

Yuder surrounded them with a wall of wind. As the calm space was stirred and their hair fluttered, Enon chuckled.

“What’s this for? There’s no need to go to such lengths here. You worry needlessly.”

Despite the chiding tone, there was no hint of annoyance in his eyes.

“…”

“Anyway, you know that long ago, this land was inhabited by various other species and mystical creatures besides humans, right?”

“I’ve heard of dragons and fairies.”

Traces of these ancient species and mystical beings, from a time long past on this continent, could occasionally be found in unearthed fossils, undecayed remnants, and legends. People often used parts of these ancient creatures to forge exceptionally durable weapons and magic artifacts. The Red Stone medium created by Thais Yulman contained fragments of an

ancient dragon’s heart and fairy dust. Similarly, it was recently discovered that the southern merchants, who had collectively chosen death, disrupting the balance in the south, had used dragon bones imbued with power.

These were the relics of beings long gone, alive only in old legends.

To Yuder, these ancient life forms existed mainly in his perception at that level.

“So, here’s a question. Did these beings possess souls when they were alive?”

This was a question Yuder had never considered, and it took him a while to respond.

“…Honestly, I’m not sure, but if they were alive, perhaps they did.”

The beings of legend, though different from humans, were thought to have had the capacity for thought and emotion. Even if different from humans, such beings might have possessed souls.

Hearing Yuder’s response, Enon smiled, tilting one corner of his mouth, and nodded slowly.

“Correct. The answer is ‘they did.’”

“…”

“Do you remember what I told you about how I was created?”

Yuder nodded slightly. Enon had confessed he was not human; he was a being created with a purpose, given life through a contract. And more…

“You said you’re a being whose will and body were combined and connected through magic.”

“Yes. That will I mentioned is the essence of a being. So, a soul. I was created by combining the soul of a spirit belonging to a fairy and a human

body through magic. I heard the spirit that provided me a soul was the last remaining on this land.”

Before Yuder could ponder the feasibility of such a creation, a story he had recently heard from Kishiar crossed his mind.

It was one of the most famous poems in the empire, about a mage and the spirit who loved him. Kishiar had said that it was actually related to the apple tree on the Hill of Abundance in the capital. The tree was believed to have been planted by the great mage Luma, and magic researchers had confirmed that the apple tree itself contained a strange magic power. He had once planned to ask Enon whether this was true.

In the midst of a whirlwind of activities, Yuder had nearly forgotten, but he never expected to recall it here, in this moment.

Feeling as if a legend had suddenly become reality, Yuder slowly spoke.

“…Not long ago, the Commander mentioned that Luma’s apple tree on the Hill of Abundance is related to a famous legend. The story of the mage and the golden apple tree spirit. I had meant to ask you about it…”

“Really? Then this will be quick. That story is about me.”

What? Yuder’s expression shifted oddly. So, was Enon the spirit who had professed an awkward love to the great mage Luma? As he recalled the pitiful lines of the spirit, dramatically recited by Kishiar, a chill was about to run down his spine when Enon, frowning slightly, continued.

“I can guess what you’re thinking, but legends aren’t entirely true. They start as rumors and tend to get exaggerated and distorted. Anyway, it’s true that the spirit who provided my soul was the spirit of the apple tree. And yes, it did willingly give itself to Luma.”

According to Enon’s explanation, the truth behind the legend was as follows.

“I was created when Luma started building the seven walls of the capital. Luma wanted to find a way to ensure the magic sustaining the walls lasted as long as possible and concluded that creating a self-aware guardian was the best solution. But even for Luma, it wasn’t easy. Understandably so.”

The great mage Luma, after several failed attempts at creating a ‘Guardian,’ was plunged into despair. What he desired was a guardian with a self, but even his magic found this a challenging feat.

During this time, he encountered a spirit, nearly extinct. Enon shrugged, indicating they seemed to have known each other already.

“Unlike the legend, Luma didn’t meet the spirit to take some treasure. The spirit was already dying, maybe he wanted to say a final goodbye.”

Unexpectedly, it was the spirit that proposed to Luma to give up its soul and fruit.

“Why?”

“Who knows. Maybe it didn’t want to quietly go extinct? Or perhaps it found Luma’s insane endeavors quite interesting.”

Enon murmured nonchalantly.

Luma accepted the offer. He returned to the capital with the last fruit from the dying spirit’s tree. That seed, contained within the fruit, was later planted on what would become known as the Hill of Abundance, growing into a tree that became part of the wall protecting the capital. The ‘soul’ became the material for the last Guardian that the great mage would create.

“So… the fruit was essentially the spirit’s soul?”

“Well, a human soul resides in the body, doesn’t it? It might not be so strange for the soul of an apple tree to be in its apples.”

Enon spoke as if it were someone else’s story.

“Anyway, Luma succeeded in binding that soul to a body to create me. Remember I said my body could be restored even after death? That’s because the soul I possess is partly connected to that apple tree on the hill. As long as the tree exists, part of my soul does too, allowing magical reabsorption and regeneration of this body.”

Enon explained that as long as the seven walls remained, the apple tree, being a component of the walls, would continue to exist in its current state.

“So, essentially… your existence, Enon, is linked to the seven walls protecting the capital, and that’s why you can serve as some sort of Guardian?”

“Judging by your expression, you seem to understand correctly. That’s why it’s not good for me to leave the capital. Even though I’m only a part, if an element of the wall strays too far, what do you think will happen?”

“…A gap would form.”

“Exactly. It would be no different than a hole appearing.”

Despite his words, Enon no longer appeared anxious. It seemed he had decided that there were definite reasons for him to be here now, as he had mentioned before.

Yuder, listening to Enon, fell into deep thought.

‘Learning about Enon’s secret origins is a bit shocking, but if this story is true… it implies that souls, in some sense, can be moved.’

Whether the spirit’s soul was originally capable of such movement or not was now impossible to determine. When asked, Enon himself had said he didn’t know.

“All I know is how I was born. I don’t have any memories like those of the spirit whose soul became part of me. When I gained my current form and self-awareness, everything was like a blank slate. Maybe the spirit, or Luma, deliberately erased the memories.”

“…”

“I don’t particularly feel bad about it. In fact, I think it’s thanks to that I was able to develop a self and live as I am now. I’m sorry that it makes it hard to give you a definite answer to what you’re curious about, though.”

“No, that’s already more than enough.”

“Luma, after creating me, didn’t pursue further research into souls. He started focusing on studies about reversing time. There might still be records of his previous research at the Hill of Abundance, but that’s about all I can recall right now.”

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Chapter 880

“Luma, after creating me, didn’t pursue further research into souls. He started focusing on studies about reversing time. There might still be records of his previous research at the Hill of Abundance, but that’s about all I can recall right now.”

If what was said was true, then it was indeed necessary to visit the Hill of Abundance, which once served as Luma’s workshop.

‘Of course, that won’t be possible right now…’

Luma, who not only studied time reversal but also the relationship between body and soul, what had he experienced and what had he desired? Did his research overlap significantly with the mysteries unfolding before Yuder, or was it merely a coincidence?

‘Initially, I sought to understand why I was able to return by reversing time, and in the process, I encountered Kishiar wearing white gloves and came this far. According to Enon, it seems Luma conducted his research in the opposite sequence.’

Regardless, this was not something Yuder could conclude right now. He decided to put aside these thoughts and focus on the immediate tasks at hand.

As he lay prostrate on the floor, Enon reacted with great alarm.

“What, what’s this? Why are you doing this? Are you crazy?”

“I had promised to lie down and express my gratitude to you once I recovered. Thank you, Enon. No, big brother.”

“Who said to actually do it for real?! Get up this instant! A fellow who’s barely had his limbs attached for long doing such…! Don’t embarrass me, get up quickly! Hey!”

Enon, ranting wildly at the air, pulled Yuder's arm. It was ironic that Enon, who had initially suggested such an action, was now upset by its actual execution. It was nonsensical, yet so characteristic of him.

"Then how am I supposed to express my gratitude?"

"Just do it! However you can! Properly!"

"Treating you right is indeed challenging."

"I'm the one who's got it tougher! You damned rascal!"

Despite Enon's earlier tolerance, he ended up grabbing both of Yuder's cheeks. It wasn't painful, but Yuder feigned a slight wince, considering Enon's feelings. He observed Enon's face, now flushed red in the ears and neck, and felt a sense of relief at the lively expression that surfaced.

Enon, who had been discussing spirits and Luma moments ago, seemed indifferent now, but his usually expressionless face appeared somewhat different today, slightly unsettling.

'Knowing how sensitive Enon reacts to mentions of Luma, his calmness might have felt strangely peculiar.'

Well, if sacrificing his cheeks could break that overly objective expression and bring back his usual lively self, it was a small price to pay.

"…Um, Pharmacist? Yuder? I've brought lemons, but I heard some unusual noise inside… May I come in?"

While Yuder was being jostled with his cheeks still in Enon's firm grip, Gakane's voice came from beyond the barrier of wind Yuder had created. Enon, still clutching Yuder's cheek, grumbled and shouted, "Come in!"

Gakane cautiously opened the door and peered in. Seeing Yuder's stretched cheeks, he blinked several times, then, instead of shock, let out a sigh of relief.

“Oh my, I was startled. I thought something had happened to Yuder again. Glad it’s nothing serious. Here, Pharmacist.”

On the beautiful ceramic plate Gakane brought were lemons, sliced whole with the peel for easy eating, and beautifully arranged with forks like a fan. Enon looked at Gakane as if seeing him anew.

“You… you’re quite something. Was it Gakane, your name?”

“Yes.”

“If only this fellow could be half as perceptive as you.”

“Thanks for the compliment, but please don’t say that. I actually prefer that Yuder isn’t someone who just reads the room like me. Everyone has their own strengths, don’t they?”

Gakane scratched the back of his head, smiling amicably. Enon clicked his tongue and then released Yuder’s cheek, picking up a fork.

“Thank you. But I still have some things to discuss with this guy.”

“Ah, I see. I’ll leave you two then.”

After Gakane left, Enon, munching on a lemon, began speaking.

“…That one, quick to catch on but lacking in confidence.”

“He has improved quite a bit, though.”

“That one? But, well… I see why you keep him around. Such types often break early.”

People usually thought the good-natured Gakane was tolerating the gruff Yuder out of kindness, but Enon said the exact opposite. It wasn’t just because he knew about Yuder’s past, which was more mature in spirit than Gakane’s. Enon, who could see through lies and truths and understand the essence of beings, must have seen the true nature of their relationship.

They were close colleagues and friends from the time they joined the Cavalry together, but also, from the perspective of Awakeners, Yuder was guiding the still inexperienced and aspiring Gakane.

Kanna too had grown under Yuder's training, but Gakane, with much stronger aspirations yet less confidence and overly selfless, needed someone strong to grab him by the scruff and lead him to find stability and grow comfortably. Therefore, Yuder had been carefully leading Gakane, ensuring he could follow without losing his way. That's why, even if it wasn't outwardly visible, Gakane too relied on Yuder as a mentor or senior in his own way.

Yuder replied with a faint smile on his lips.

"It used to be like that. But this time, it won't be."

"Just like I thought, he's someone from your past life, like me or yourself."

Enon, realizing Gakane was connected to Yuder's previous life, turned his gaze towards the closed door.

"By the way, were the events that happened this time something you already knew about?"

"In a way, yes, but also no."

Yuder knew there would be internal strife in the Star of Nagran. However, in his previous life, these events happened much later, and many of the other occurrences were different in both process and outcome.

Yuder reflected on the changed and failed events, yet here he was, sitting unharmed. When he discovered three cracks in the sky, which turned into one after Hosanna's death, everything felt incredibly distant. His mind was half-crazed with the thought that he must solve this, unable to see anything else, and it seemed like everything was rushing towards failure.

"Even now… it might just be a brief respite, an unknown moment of leisure between failures."

The number of cracks might have decreased from three to one, but the occurrence of the abnormal cracks was undeniable. If two such cracks appeared in quick succession, there was a high chance of another disaster striking the south soon.

Whether it be earthquakes and tsunamis like those Kishiar had prepared for, or something else entirely.

After sharing these thoughts, Yuder looked down at the ground, continuing his speech.

“But it’s strange, after waking up and meeting others on my way down here, I don’t feel as despondent as before.”

“…”

“Well, of course, I’m still concerned about that incomprehensible dream with the white gloves and whether the Commander will recover… But anyway, the situation now seems quite different from what I had thought when I last saw the crack. No, significantly different.”

Yuder muttered absentmindedly, then took a short breath with a huff.

“Am I being too lax because there were no deaths on our side, or did I actually suffer more mental than physical damage?”

“…Realizing that despairing in advance changes nothing is a good thing. Why worry about something so pointless? Didn’t you say you’ve already prepared for it?”

Enon, responding brusquely, forcefully shoved a lemon into Yuder’s mouth.

“Your Commander is neither dead nor internally shattered, so he should recover somehow. Eat this, and next time you encounter those white gloves in your dream or wherever it may be, just ask everything. That seems the most certain way.”

“But they told me not to come back there.”

“And you said you don’t know how you got there in the first place, right?”

Enon snorted scornfully after his sharp remark, looking at Yuder who was unable to respond.

“Then you might end up going there again someday. If there’s a connection between these abnormal cracks and your dreams of that fellow, the likelihood is even higher. Of course, I’d go crazy if you went in the same half-dead state as this time, but the first time you went, you weren’t in such a condition.”

“…”

“Ask when you see him. You said whatever you asked, he answered.”

“…It’s not that easy to just… Ugh.”

Before Yuder could finish speaking, the lemon shoved into his mouth stopped him. He chewed on the sour lemon, wincing as it made his nose tingle. Enon laughed loudly at the sight.

“What’s the harm! At least thinking that way is better than nothing! This is what you get for talking nonsense after all the trouble of saving you.”

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Chapter 881

“What’s the harm! At least thinking that way is better than nothing! This is what you get for talking nonsense after all the trouble of saving you.”

Yuder, who normally wasn’t picky about his food, found himself eating a whole raw lemon for the first time. It was so sour he thought his mouth might actually melt, but seeing Enon’s enjoyment, he chewed and swallowed it without spitting it out.

‘Enon eats this every day and is still fine… I guess he truly is not a real human…’

“I’ll be going now.”

“Ah, wait a moment.”

Enon grabbed Yuder’s arm as he rose from his meal.

“There’s something important left to discuss.”

“Something important?”

“Remember the day it hailed? I knew about the strange cracks from what you told me, but that day was the first time I actually saw one. The monsters emerged and disappeared before I could inspect closely, but I did see them.”

This indeed seemed significant. Yuder sat back down.

“So, what did you feel when you saw it?”

“I’m not sure if ‘feel’ is the right word, but seeing it in person, I understood why you were so alarmed. I also remembered what Luma said.”

“What did he say?”

“Before Luma left, he gave me a final message.”

Enon’s gaze became distant, as if searching for a memory.

“He spoke of a time when everyone dreamed of a peaceful future, yet he worried about the return of the past. He said he had done all he could for that person, and when the time came, I would be needed… he asked me to be ready.”

Yuder closed his eyes briefly, feeling a mix of confusion and realization.

The return of the past felt undeniably like a prophecy of a great destruction. So, the great mage and his associates of the newly-founded Orr Empire had prepared, thinking the calamity might return? They created the guardian, Enon, to protect the capital?

It made sense. A life spent on the battlefield would make one vigilant, even in peace. The buildings from the early days of the empire were more functional than beautiful, prepared for war. Even the Seven Walls of the Capital, though more beautiful and mystical, were built in the same context.

But if there was a ‘basis’ for these preparations, more than just the fears of those who had experienced war, the statement took on a significantly different meaning.

Now, a thousand years have passed, and Yuder Aile here is a living witness who struggled and died because he was convinced that the world was heading toward destruction.

And if the great mage from a thousand years ago had the same belief, with solid reasons…

Yuder’s fingertips twitched. He struggled to contain his rising emotions and asked,

“Was there a basis for that belief?”

“I don’t know. Until you appeared, I was confident that the capital wouldn’t face such danger. That was before I heard how desperately you fought that

giant monster in the west.”

Remembering a previous conversation with Enon, Yuder recalled their past exchange.

In response to Enon’s question about why he killed the colossal Pethuamet alone without waiting for backup, Yuder replied that it would have been too late to turn back. He had known what could happen if the creature grew larger over time, becoming a disaster of immense proportions.

Enon had said something then.

‘I think I understand now what you meant by a goal that wasn’t personal. But… no, it’s not yet time for that. Or is it?’

Those words had barely been audible.

Had Enon been recalling Luma’s statement at that moment?

“I’ve told you before, I possess the soul of a spirit but have no memory. So, I don’t know what the world, shattered and ruined a thousand years ago, was like. But I do think that the destruction Luma faced then might have looked like the strange cracks we saw that day.”

“…”

“Because of what Luma said back then, I always thought he wanted me to guard within the Seven Walls if the capital ever faced a crisis that could lead to its destruction. But after seeing those cracks and thinking more about the great destruction… I wonder if that wasn’t all there was to it.”

“If not that, then what else could there be?”

“I don’t know… Did Luma ever consider that I, a being with self-awareness he created, might one day decide to leave the capital on my own initiative…? That’s a question that’s only now occurred to me.”

“So you mean that even these exceptional decisions you’re making might actually have been intended by Luma?”

“Something like that… It’s hard to be sure, but yes. The great destruction isn’t just about preventing it from reaching the capital.”

Indeed, Luma’s last instruction wasn’t precisely to ‘guard the capital.’ He had simply said that Enon would be needed ‘when the time came.’

Enon was a guardian of the Seven Walls and part of the walls themselves. Yet, he could temporarily wander far away without any issue. Was this characteristic given to him without reason?

‘Luma wanted to create a guardian with a soul, believing it to be the best course. So, the best course might be…’

Perhaps, in the absence of the mage Luma, it was necessary to have an entity capable of deciding when and how the legacy of the Seven Walls, left by Luma, should act.

With this thought, Yuder’s perspective on the Seven Walls, which he had always taken for granted, suddenly shifted in a completely new direction.

Yuder had always believed, like others, that the Seven Walls of the Capital were created to protect the palace, the imperial family, and the entire capital.

Yet, despite the Walls being fully functional, countless people, including members of the imperial family, had been assassinated within the palace over a thousand years. More than that, Awakeners, including the sage, had even summoned monsters to attack the Sun Palace, where the Emperor resided.

At the time, it was speculated that this was the result of unprecedented abilities of the Awakeners, unaffected by the magic-created Walls. But what if the Seven Walls had never actually been activated for their true purpose until now, merely existing with their given power?

Because Enon, a part of the Walls and a guardian with decision-making authority in Luma’s stead, hadn’t made that decision yet.

And even Enon had always considered himself merely a part of the Seven Walls, waiting for the uncertain ‘time’ Luma had spoken of.

“Enon.”

“Hmm?”

“This is just my thought, but…”

Yuder hesitated for a moment before slowly sharing his ideas. Enon, who initially listened as if wondering what Yuder was talking about, pressed his lips tightly together in silence by the end of the conversation.

“It’s absurd, but… it’s a speculation worth considering. I know I’m a guardian and I’m aware of my purpose and power, but I’ve never thought about actively moving the Walls. I’ve never stepped forward for my mission in a serious way.”

“If you think I’ve gone too far, feel free to ignore it.”

“No. Since I’ll have to continue acting as a guardian anyway, I should definitely be clear about that aspect. And about the strange cracks. I plan to keep investigating them.”

“How will you investigate?”

“Well, your fellow mages and the mage unions have been quite diligent in investigating the traces of the strange cracks that appeared last time. I should join in and have a look. There was something I felt when I saw it… I’ll talk about it once I’m more certain.”

“Got it. I’ll let them know you’ll be joining the investigation.”

“Alright. But why do you keep calling me ‘you’? Aren’t you being a bit cheeky?”

Shouldn’t you say ‘big brother’? Enon grumbled and pinched his cheek, just as the door opened again. The entrant was Gakane, just like before.

However, this time, he looked too urgent to even glance at the situation inside.

“Gakane?”

“Sorry to interrupt, Pharmacist, and Yuder. Urgent news just came in…”

“What happened?”

“There’s been a report of another strange crack sighted near Charloin, in a place called Mclara. It’s not confirmed, but it seems to be exactly like the cracks that appeared in Charloin…!”

Yuder immediately rose from his seat, his previous thoughts vanished without a trace.

“Who reported it? Lead me there right away.”

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Chapter 882

“Who reported it? Lead me there right away.”

“It was a guard sent by Lord of Mclara. I didn’t believe it at first, but then he presented a token and said he had recently heard from someone from the Cavalry, instructing him to come directly to the branch if anything happened.”

Gakane unclenched his fist that he had been holding tightly. There, lay a button that only a member of the Cavalry could possess, along with a wax seal bearing the imprint of Duke Peletta. Upon seeing this, Yuder immediately nodded in acknowledgment.

“It’s definitely sent by the Commander. There’s no need for doubt.”

Previously, Kisiar and Yuder had secretly toured Mclara and three other cities together. These places had been particularly affected by a major earthquake in a previous game, and there had been many sightings of strange cracks.

Their actions and subsequent responses during that time had now been clearly validated by this current communication.

Yuder followed Gakane outside, with Enon reacting to the mention of the strange cracks and following suit. Alik, who had been sitting even after finishing his business with Lusan, raised his hand as if to greet them joyfully, but immediately shrank back, swallowing his words, as their eyes met.

They found Ever and an elderly guard, who was sitting with anxious faces in the waiting room where visitors to the southern branch temporarily stayed.

“That’s him. He was so anxious, I went to call you while Ever was dealing with him.”

“Good job.”

Yuder approached them, straightening his back and shoulders, his posture immaculate. With a long exhale and a quick adjustment of his clothes, he perfectly embodied the role of the Commander’s assistant.

“Greetings. I am Yuder Aile, assistant to the Commander of the Cavalry. You’ve come from Mclara, I understand.”

“Yes, yes.”

While speaking, Yuder exchanged a brief glance with Ever. Ever, having apparently heard of Yuder’s awakening, showed no great surprise. Instead, she subtly moved her hand under the table, conveying a message through hand signals.

Are you alright? Good to hear. I leave the next part to you.

With just three hand gestures, she conveyed her concern and trust in Yuder to handle the visitor. In the past, Ever would have spoken these words aloud, but now she adeptly read the official situation and communicated silently, as befitting a Deputy Commander of the Cavalry.

Yuder naturally switched places with Ever and sat in front of the guest.

“I’ve heard a bit about the situation on my way here, but I would like to hear more details. When, where, and how was the crack witnessed? Please also tell me what the Lord instructed you to convey.”

“Uh, but… isn’t the Commander of the Cavalry coming here?”

The guard looked nervously at Yuder, then at Ever, Gakane, and Enon standing around. Despite Yuder Aile’s growing fame, his name and face alone were not yet enough to grant immediate trust everywhere, especially among those used to seeing more seasoned figures.

“Regrettably, the Commander is currently unavailable due to other commitments. But rest assured, any message you have will be promptly relayed. You’ve come in haste to share urgent news, haven’t you?”

“…”

“Seeing the empty water cup, you must be thirsty from the journey. Please, have a drink first.”

With an impassive face, Yuder lifted a finger, and a stream of water magically spiraled out of thin air, filling the guard’s empty cup without spilling a single drop.

The elderly guard, witnessing the miraculous scene that had unfolded before him, swallowed his breath in awe.

For Yuder, proving his capabilities had always been the most effective way to silence those who were distrustful and anxious. This approach, honed through years of experience, once again helped him achieve his desired outcome.

With trembling hands, the guard drank the water and began to speak.

“It appeared this morning, just before dawn. Farmers going out to chop wood stumbled upon it and ran to inform the Lord. The Lord was still asleep, so I went to check it first. There it was, hovering over the well.”

The crack was about the size of a man’s arm and did not spawn any monsters, merely floating there. Rumors about similar incidents in Charloin had already spread to Mclara, causing widespread anxiety.

The guard had immediately rushed to the Lord’s bedroom to inform him upon seeing it. However, by the time the Lord went to investigate, the crack had long disappeared.

The guard was inwardly worried that the Lord, who quickly lost interest in matters not profitable, might dismiss this too. But the Lord, after staring into the void where the crack had been and pondering for a moment, gave an unexpected order.

“Who saw that thing floating there? You? Then you go to Charloin right now.”

Startled by the unexpected command, the guard asked if he should approach the Lord of Charloin. The reply from the Lord of Mclara was even more surprising.

“Why bother with that fool? You shouldn’t even cast a shadow where he might fall into disfavor, especially since he’s rumored to be out of favor with the upcoming Duchess of Herne.”

“Then where should I go?”

“Go to the Cavalry’s branch. Take this with you. Tell them what happened and guide them here. If they pretend not to know, don’t insist, just return.”

The Lord handed the guard a button from the Cavalry and a wax seal with Duke Peletta’s crest, which he pulled from his pocket. The guard, though doubtful, accepted and hurriedly left. As he departed, he faintly heard the Lord’s grumbling.

“Did they foresee such an event? Well, since I’ve reaped some benefits, I suppose I must do this tedious task. Tsk!…”

Thus, the guard had come here, torn between doubt and anxiety. The Lord had said there was no need to cling if they feigned ignorance, but the guard, loving his homeland, couldn’t bring himself to do that. He had resorted to even lying, confronting the skeptical Cavalry members to finally reach the southern branch.

Having finished his story, the guard gulped down the rest of his water. He then turned to Yuder with a look of earnest concern.

“On my way here, I saw many broken roads, buildings, and injured people. Even in the branch here, I saw many still bandaged. Is Mclara going to suffer the same fate?”

“No.”

Yuder’s response, calm yet filled with undeniable certainty, surprised not the guard, but the others around Yuder.

“You said the crack disappeared without spawning any monsters. Then there is no immediate danger.”

“What do you mean by ‘no immediate danger’? …?”

“It means that while there might be incidents in the future, we won’t just leave them unaddressed, so it’s alright.”

After saying this, Yuder turned his head towards Ever.

“Ever. I need five to seven members ready to leave immediately. They must be able to defend Mclara and, additionally, I request that you seek reinforcements from the Imperial Army as well.”

“Of course, that’s possible. I’ll find them right away, just wait a bit.”

Ever, with a swift and precise movement, promptly left the waiting room. Yuder then turned to the bewildered guard and spoke again.

“I will also inform the First Princess of Herne, so you can expect additional support from that end soon. I will write a letter for you to deliver to the Lord of Mclara.”

“Ah, understood.”

“Your action in not covering up the crack but immediately reporting it and coming here without rest was truly commendable. May I know your name?”

“It’s Orlun… .”

“The faith shown by you, Mr. Orlun, and the Lord of Mclara, will not be forgotten by our Commander. And if similar cracks appear again, please continue to report every single one without fail. It’s very important.”

Yuder’s voice, devoid of overt emotion, nonetheless carried a power that made the listener feel significantly acknowledged. The guard blinked awkwardly, feeling both embarrassed and pleased, as Yuder briefly stepped

outside and then returned. He handed the guard a letter along with a pouch, whispering softly enough for only him to hear.

“Please deliver both the letter and this pouch directly to the Lord. Make sure to mention that this is a gesture of goodwill from the Cavalry.”

Inside the modest pouch, the guard heard the unmistakable jingle of coins.

‘This, this is…!’

The Lord of Mclara, ruling over a poor and small domain, was famously known for turning a blind eye for the right price. Though it was unclear how these people knew this, receiving such a reward meant the Lord of Mclara would not disregard the new foreigners entering his domain and would likely turn a blind eye to whatever they did.

It was evident that the young Cavalry member in front of him knew precisely what kind of person the Lord of Mclara was.

This is no ordinary man.

Feeling a pleasant chill run down his spine, the guard nodded in agreement.

“That, that I will do. Understood!”

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Chapter 883

In the end, the guard from Mclara returned, leading six Cavalry members, five Imperial Special Forces members, and twenty regular Imperial Soldiers sent by General Gino during that brief time. His departing figure, once filled with anxiety and worry, was now brimming with hope and joy.

Yet, Yuder watched his retreating figure without a trace of a smile.

‘It’s probably just the beginning.’

The appearance of the abnormal cracks described by the guard was exactly as Yuder remembered from his previous life. They appeared briefly before vanishing, leading most who saw them to believe they had imagined it or hallucinated. Only when calamity struck later would they recall and speak of the strange omens they had witnessed.

Could he be certain that the abnormal crack that appeared in Mclara this dawn was the first of its kind? Yuder was convinced it was not.

‘Surely, they must have appeared elsewhere after the Charloin incident. It’s just that no witnesses were present or the reports never reached the higher-ups.’

Kishiar remembered well the information Yuder had provided about the Lord of Mclara’s fondness for money and had certainly made good use of it. The Lord’s attitude, as described by the guard, proved it.

He had preemptively worked his influence in the four cities identified by Yuder. If the Lords there learned of the incidents between Mclara and the Cavalry, then probably…

“Reports of overlooked abnormal cracks will start coming in one after another.”

Noble Lords were invariably full of pride. Admitting an inability to handle a bizarre incident in their domain and seeking external assistance was no easy task, especially if it meant relying on a newly formed group like the Cavalry.

However, the Lord of Mclara, who had previously, in the previous life, decided to establish a Cavalry branch in his domain for the sake of money, had no such qualms this time either. While he couldn't be described as having a pleasant nature, he was a pragmatist who delivered cleanly once paid.

With his prompt contact with the Cavalry, rumors spread that he had protected his domain and received substantial support, including money. This would likely prompt the Lords of the other three major cities and those nearby, who were watching the situation keenly, to follow suit.

Starting was difficult, but once the way was paved, the rest would be easier.

"Yuder, is it really okay to send only that much support? What if monsters appear as they did before?"

Ever, having seen off the departing group, asked with a hint of worry.

"If we were certain that the crack would appear only in Mclara and end there, then focusing all our strength there would be the right choice."

"Ah… So, Yuder, you think there might be more of these occurrences elsewhere?"

"Based on the discussion with the Commander, it seems likely."

Unable to disclose the basis of his certainty, Yuder instead implicated Kishiar. Mentioning Kishiar's name usually made the members accept even incomprehensible orders more easily.

"Ah, if the Commander said so… It makes sense. There's no rule saying the strange cracks have to appear only there. Then, it's important to distribute our strength."

“We can’t be sure what will happen, but if an incident like today’s occurs again, I’ll continue to entrust the support arrangement to you, Ever. Is that alright?”

“Of course. Thinking about it, maybe the Commander considered all this when giving that order.”

“That order?”

“Ahh… Yuder, were you not aware? We decided to call for volunteers from other branches to come here.”

Upon hearing the word ‘volunteers’, a faint memory seemed to stir within him. Yuder recalled a conversation he had with Kishiar the previous night, heavy with sleepiness.

-In case things continue as you have mentioned, I thought it might be insufficient with just the personnel from this branch, so I prepared in advance. It’s fortunate in a way that we started recruiting the second batch of members…

Yes, he had indeed spoken about preparing for the possibility of needing more personnel than the branch currently had. That must have been the part Ever was referring to.

‘No need to worry, then…’

“I believe I’ve heard about it. It’s coming back to me. How is the situation with the volunteers?”

“It seems we will have more people than expected. In the Eastern and Western regions, even among the successful candidates, there were volunteers. I’m a bit concerned about bringing in people who haven’t been properly trained yet… But the Commander seems to think it’s not a bad idea. After all, the new recruits from the South have been a great help.”

“…Right.”

The successful candidates from the East and West.

Faces of a few people he had met while traveling recently flashed in his mind.

‘Gloe and Marin would be quite helpful if they come now. Of course, I should first check if Marin has actually gone to the Western branch after meeting us…’

“But Yuder, are you really alright now?”

“As you can see, I’m perfectly fine.”

“That’s truly a relief. I’ve been so worried since we parted in that hailstorm. I haven’t seen the Commander’s face properly since then…”

“The Commander, too, will shake it off and rise soon enough.”

Talking about Kishiar made Yuder hesitate involuntarily. He had only been down for an hour or two, but an anxious desire to return to Kishiar, who was likely still in his chamber, crept up on him.

“That would be good. I hope to see him soon. Please tell him we miss him.”

“I will.”

Ever grinned and, mentioning that she had a backlog of work, disappeared. Yuder joined Gakane, who had been watching from a distance. Enon was nowhere to be seen.

“Enon?”

“He said he didn’t need to hear more and left earlier.”

“And what will you do now?”

“I’d like to say training… but I haven’t been given the go-ahead for that yet. Without a master to learn swordsmanship from, and without Kanna, all I can do is help others, really.”

‘…Nathan Zuckerman and Kanna are gone? Where did they go?”

This new information made him turn his head in surprise.

“Not just those two, Pruelle and Nipollen left with them. They departed this morning… I don’t know the details, but it seems the Commander gave them some kind of mission.”

“The Commander?”

“Kanna mentioned it might take a few days. So, they might be traveling quite far… You didn’t know either?”

Nathan Zuckerman, Kanna, Pruelle, Nipollen. It was an intriguing combination.

A task that required sending all four of them…

‘Could they be searching for that Nahan fellow.’

A shapeshifter and an information collector. The fact that Nipollen had been sent, despite the risks, was concerning. If the task required Nipollen’s presence, it likely involved identifying an Awakener. Among potential missions, the only one that came to mind was this.

Kishiar was not one to send people on dangerous missions without certainty. Yuder surmised that Kishiar must have sent Nathan Zuckerman on a few missions before, gaining some assurance that led him to decide to send others.

‘He must be highly considering the possibility that he’s still alive.’

The moment he stabbed Hosanna, the image of Nahan beyond him flashed in his mind. At that time, Nahan’s condition seemed too dire to believe he was anything but dead.

Yet, could it be that Hosanna had ultimately sacrificed his own life to push him into an escape route, ensuring his survival?

“…”

“Yuder! I know you’ve just woken up and might be a bit tired, but if you’re up for it, would you like to take a walk outside?”

Just as Yuder clenched his fist, glaring at the ground, Gakane approached with a cheerful voice, patting his back.

“Don’t you want to check out what’s been going on in the branch while you were asleep? Actually, the people here did some remarkable things on the day of the hailstorm. There are many who haven’t seen you yet, so it might be nice to go out and greet them.”

Perhaps noticing the change in Yuder’s expression, Gakane’s suggestion seemed quite comforting at the moment. While Yuder still longed to go to Kishiar… it wouldn’t be bad to assess the situation with his own eyes first.

Yuder nodded slowly.

“…Alright.”

“Great. Good decision!”

Gakane, enthusiastic like an excited large dog, led Yuder out. The branch’s exterior was much busier than the inside. And the most noticeable thing of all was…

“…What’s with that huge pit?”

“Hahahat. I knew that would catch your eye first.”

Gakane laughed heartily, as if he had anticipated this reaction.

“It’s an incredible collaboration created by Hellem and Alik on the Hail Night.”

“Collaboration…?”

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Chapter 884

“Collaboration…?”

Yuder gazed at the long and vast pit that started at the front gate of the branch and stretched beyond his sight. It was nearly the size of a moat dug in front of a fortress wall, only without water.

“Amazing, isn’t it? The two of them realized that the monsters could only see straight ahead. They used this to block paths around Charloin, herding them towards this branch. Then, they fell into the trap set in this pre-dug pit.”

“…What kind of trap?”

“I didn’t know, but Mage Hellem was a great master of water-based magic. She swept up the hail that day, turned it into water, and added poison.”

“Where did the poison come from?”

“That… Remember the creature we brought here? The poison was extracted from it, using a magic device brought by Alik…”

Hellem, a renowned monster researcher, quickly identified the weaknesses of the monsters. The monsters that appeared that day had very narrow vision, breathed through their skin, and once they started running at speed, it was difficult for them to stop.

Based on the weaknesses Hellem discovered, they devised a plan to lure the monsters into a trap. Alik utilized several prototypes of magic devices he had created, which proved incredibly useful for the task.

Most creatures that breathe through their skin are vulnerable to their skin crumpling or drying out. Since it was difficult to dry out their skin on a day with hail, they instead filled the pit with water mixed with poison extracted

from the long-tailed monster, Penpen, which they had brought here. The front of the branch became a perfect trap.

Even for mages, who had a narrower range of abilities than Awakeners, digging pits, blocking paths, and mixing poison was relatively easy. However, deciding to carry out such actions in the middle of a city required extraordinary boldness.

The tremendous trap created by the two mages proved incredibly effective the moment the monsters fell into it.

The monsters poured out from all sides along the blocked path and leaped into the pit. Even those who sensed something was amiss and tried to stop were inevitably pushed into the pit by their kin charging from behind.

The terrifying chorus of screams from the monsters burning in the poisoned water. The strange smell.

While Alik, with a handkerchief over his nose and mouth, trembled in fear and teared up from the toxic fumes as he fished out the dead monsters with a magic device, Hellem, without blinking an eye, pulled out the corpses of the dead monsters with her gloved hands.

“The noise and smell were so horrendous that the nearby members came here. They were all speechless at the sight, thinking they had entered hell.”

“…”

Just hearing Gakane’s explanation vividly painted the horrific scene that must have unfolded at that pit.

“It was quite dreadful, but thanks to that trap, the burden on the candidates and members who went to guard around the branch was significantly reduced. Later, they all worked together to push the monsters into that trap.”

The reason the pit had not yet been completely filled, even after two weeks, was simple. The place, filled with monster blood and poisoned water, needed to be purified.

“We started filling it slowly from the purified areas, and now only this much remains. The priests aiding in the purification said it might take about another month to fill it completely.”

“Yes…”

Yuder recalled Hellem and Alik, whom he had encountered earlier in the infirmary. They were collaborators with the Cavalry but not members, and yet, it was surprising they had gone to such lengths despite having no obligation to defend this place.

Perhaps Alik, who seemed eager to speak to Yuder earlier, was proud of what he had accomplished.

Yuder, remembering the once timid Alik, murmured softly, “Impressive.”

“Right? Everyone’s talking about how amazing it is. It made me see the mages in a new light. Honestly, I had a bit of a… well, a small prejudice before.”

Gakane smiled sheepishly.

“Even though I knew about Mage Hellem, I wondered why the Commander called Alik all the way from the capital… But after seeing the courage Alik showed on the Hail Night and his new magic devices, I wasn’t the only one who changed his mind.”

“New magic devices?”

Yuder, intrigued, thought these were magic devices only usable by mages, but it seemed there was more he wasn’t aware of. Gakane grinned and explained.

“He created a lot of new magic devices, ones even Awakeners could use!”

“…What?”

“That’s why people who were weakened or injured could still lure the monsters into the trap.”

It was a known fact among a few in the Cavalry that Alik was both a mage and an Awakener. However, on the Hail Night, Alik candidly revealed his water-manipulating abilities to the Awakeners he encountered and shared the new magic devices he had created.

These were devices that operated not on magic but on the power of Awakeners. Their only function was to emit a slight invisible force to push enemies away, but it was effective enough to drive them into the trap.

Everyone who had come to the scene after hearing the tremendous noise from the pit, including Cyregina and other successful candidates from the Star of Nagran, benefited greatly from the new magic devices Alik had given them.

“Since the Hail Night, both have been receiving treatment for magic power depletion. They probably came to see the priest earlier for that reason…”

Gakane continued to speak, but Yuder was no longer listening. His mind was overwhelmed with astonishment at the new magic device that could produce entirely different effects based on an Awakener’s power.

‘Is it really possible… to create something like that?’

Yuder wasn’t too surprised when Alik managed to control an Awakener’s power, as such devices had existed in his previous life, and he had merely entrusted Alik to make them this time.

But he had no idea Alik had gone further than that.

Without having seen the device, it was hard to comment, but at least he was certain such a thing hadn’t existed in his previous life. The thought that this device could be a turning point, potentially aligning Awakeners’ powers more closely with those of mages, made his heart race.

He had never anticipated such a development. Whether it would lead to good or bad outcomes was still unknown, as it was an unprecedented event.

But for now, the important thing was that it had undeniably been a boon to their allies.

‘I must delve deeper into this. Maybe I’ve been underestimating the mage Alik Pelgin all this time.’

Alik was a being whose name had not been prominent in his previous life. This was Yuder’s first encounter with him in this life as well. Until now, Yuder’s image of him was merely that of a pitiable disciple of Thais Yulman, and incidentally, the first mage to become an Awakener.

But now, Yuder began to think that Alik’s true talent might have been hidden elsewhere.

‘Having both magic power and the strength of an Awakener, he is someone who can understand both, thus comprehending the power of an Awakener in the way of a mage… If handled well, Alik could become someone who brings us completely new things never seen before.’

In his previous life, there were those who were both mages and Awakeners. However, they mostly chose to live as mages, not openly revealing their Awakener powers due to the deep rift between mages and Awakeners. No one dared to straddle both sides.

But this time was different. Now that Yuder knew about Alik’s exceptional understanding of power and his talent for creating something based on it, he decided that he could not just let this opportunity pass by.

He was certain that Alik could be of help to future Awakeners.

It was a very strong conviction.

‘It’s been a while since I’ve felt this way… this feeling…’

“Good to see Yuder is also interested in it. Oh, there’s Cyregina over there, shall we go and greet her?”

Seeing Yuder’s brightened expression, Gakane also smiled broadly and raised his voice. Yuder, startled but not avoiding him, exchanged greetings

with Cyregina, and went down to the entrance of the underground dungeon to receive a bouquet of get-well flowers made by Reneve herself.

The Southern Branch of the Cavalry was a mess compared to before, but at the same time, it was more lively than ever. Having endured the Hail Night, everything felt much more solid.

The people here were not merely relying on the Commander or Yuder. They took pride in overcoming adversity to get here and knew better than anyone what they needed to do.

“Yuder, it’s alright here, you can rest more if you’re tired!”

“Stay strong, Assistant to the Commander! Glad you’re getting better!”

As proof, different words than before constantly followed Yuder.

Chewing over these unfamiliar words, Yuder parted ways with Gakane and returned to Kishiar’s bedroom.

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Chapter 885

Outside, life thrived abundantly, but not a single sound invaded the bedroom of Kishiar. Was it because of the deep, tranquil silence, akin to being submerged in deep water? Kishiar, engulfed in the sharp scent of incense and with eyes closed, seemed to be in a world completely different from the outside.

The man, a swordmaster who hardly needed sleep, had utilized this advantage to its fullest. Yet now, he lay asleep almost all day. It made one wonder if his frequent stays in the bedroom, especially when his condition was poor, were not solely for isolation.

Yuder quietly took a seat beside the bed. His gaze first fell upon the incense, almost burnt out. The bitter fragrance was now overtaken by a stronger scent of smoke.

No matter how beneficial, it was an aroma Kishiar never particularly enjoyed.

‘It wouldn’t matter if I removed it,’ Yuder thought.

With a light movement of his hand, the faint smoke from the incense ceased.

Yuder, instead of using a stronger breeze to dispel the remaining fragrance, released a scent he had recently kept contained. The scent of a second-gender Awakener, while not solely perceived through the nose, was definitely helpful in such situations.

The scent, known only to Yuder, spread like mist, pushing away the incense’s aroma and enveloping the two in its embrace.

Such actions, in his previous life, were a way for second-gender Awakeners in deep relationships to express possessiveness. Yuder never expected to initiate such a gesture, but found the experience surprisingly pleasant.

Yuder’s eyes then drifted to a hand peeking out from under the covers.

A bare hand, not clad in gloves.

He removed his own gloves, mirroring the bare hand, and slowly placed his atop Kishiar’s. Kishiar’s hand felt slightly warmer than usual, possibly with a mild fever.

‘The lack of sweat on his forehead suggests it’s nothing serious…’

Yet, Yuder couldn’t help feeling unfamiliar and worried. Looking around, he spotted a basin and towel nearby, seemingly prepared for reducing fever. This suggested such incidents might have occurred before.

Yuder filled the basin with cold water and soaked the soft towel. As he gently wiped Kishiar’s forehead, neck, and hands, a strange feeling enveloped him.

It was his first time watching over someone like this, yet he managed to mimic the care quite convincingly, thanks to Kishiar’s past demonstrations.

‘The reason I could do it so well… probably because there have been many days like today, and I have often been the one receiving care.’

Yuder moved his hands as he remembered how Kishiar had effortlessly handled similar tasks back in the West. The cool water eased the heat from the skin, but another dilemma arose.

‘Should I change his clothes?’

Hesitating, Yuder slightly pulled back the blanket. A glimpse of bare skin showed through the parted shirt. He knew what lay beneath, yet he felt oddly nervous.

It was funny to feel tense in front of someone he had been so intimate with. Anyone else would laugh, but even at 100 years old, facing Kishiar La Orr, he’d probably be just as tense in this situation. It can’t be helped.

How could it not be so? Despite seeing his face every day, the emotions emanating from it always felt novel and unfamiliar.

Yet, on the other hand, when in contact with him, Yuder felt the most natural and familiar sensations. To be more precise, these sensations seemed akin to fitting perfectly into the missing piece of Yuder Aile's existence.

After a moment of hesitation, Yuder decided not to change Kishiar's clothes. Instead, he once again took his hand and gently rested his forehead on the back of it. The faint body scent emanating from their touching skin seemed to occasionally stabilize his uneasily pounding heart.

What kind of dreams might Kishiar be having now? Yuder thought it would be better not to dream at all, but if he was dreaming, he hoped it would be a better dream than his own.

And, if possible, it would be even better if Kishiar woke up soon to hear and laugh about what had happened today with him.

After all, no matter how interesting or astonishing the events, they held no meaning if Kishiar couldn't hear them.

Yuder found such thoughts unfamiliar to himself, yet they didn't feel strange. He sighed deeply.

'This is really severe,' he mused.

From unwillingly letting other scents cover Kishiar to everything up to now, there wasn't a single thing that wasn't clumsily like a child's.

Still, being able to freely watch Kishiar as much as he wanted wasn't bad. Compared to the two weeks he himself had lain bedridden, waiting for Kishiar's waking moments was but a fleeting instant.

Imprinting the sensation of waiting for someone slowly into his being, Yuder contemplated what he would say when Kishiar awoke.

Time passed without his gaze ever leaving the sleeping man's face, and finally, the closed eyelids silently lifted.

Perhaps this is what it felt like when time, which seemed to have stopped, started to flow again. Yuder felt his slowly beating heart suddenly quicken as he intently watched the awakening.

Kishiar's eyes, which had been staring blankly, first moved to Yuder's hand holding his, and then to his face. The face that had appeared lifeless, like an inanimate object, suddenly filled with vitality in a breathtakingly unfamiliar way.

"…Ah."

Kishiar parted his lips, let out a breath, blinked softly, and smiled broadly. "Have you been waiting all this while for me to wake up? This is the most pleasant awakening."

Yuder saw the familiar smile he knew so well and never tired of seeing, reappearing before him. At the same time, his time and heart, which seemed to have stopped, completely returned to their usual rhythm. The space, which had seemed colorless, filled with color, and sound returned to the silent world.

Yuder gazed at the man's face and murmured softly,

"…Did you feel like this?"

Kishiar's red eyes blinked, seemingly questioning, "Hmm?"

"Haven't you watched me wake up several times? I thought it might be boring… but if you watched with such feelings, maybe it wasn't so bad after all."

"What are you talking about?"

Kishiar might have thought it strange to say such a thing upon waking up, but he laughed as if he understood exactly what Yuder meant. His hand, regaining strength, grasped Yuder's hand and pulled it closer.

"I have never found waiting for you wearisome, not even once. Every moment you awaken and return to me is too wondrous and precious for

such thoughts.”

“…”

It was truly a relief that he had awoken. Yuder hadn’t succumbed to the sudden impulse to press his lips against those of the sleeping man.

When Yuder leaned in to kiss him, Kishiar’s eyes widened briefly, but then he smiled and accepted it. Their lips gently met and parted repeatedly until they finally completely separated, leaving Yuder keenly aware of his own scent, now much more intense in the bedroom than before.

Kishiar, too, seemed to fully perceive it, smiling. The man inhaled deeply, as if drawing in the scent, and then opened his eyes, slightly moist with a hint of warmth, and spoke slowly.

“…Did you wait long?”

Yuder slowly shook his head. In truth, he wasn’t quite sure how many hours had passed.

“No.”

“Seeing that the bandages on your arms are gone and you’ve changed your clothes, it seems I slept longer than I thought. You must have gone out, perhaps to meet the pharmacist…”

“…”

“It’s fortunate, then, that waiting for me while I slept wasn’t too tiresome for you.”

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Chapter 886

“It’s fortunate, then, that waiting for me while I slept wasn’t too tiresome for you.”

For a moment, he was at a loss for words. The weight behind those words felt overwhelmingly heavy.

He knew all too well the man before him, who carried a light demeanor and face, yet held immense loyalty and steadfastness within. Therefore, that moment, when Kishiar’s eyes saw nothing but him, felt exceptionally significant.

How could he speak such words with such a calm face?

Was it really that important to him that Yuder Aile wasn’t bored?

Yuder exhaled deeply to quell the ripples spreading within his heart. Then, nodding towards the man smiling slyly, he said,

“As you say, there were quite some surprising changes during my outing, so it wasn’t boring.”

“Ah, as expected.”

“But… it’s a pity that the one who should have heard it with me was not present.”

Upon hearing Yuder’s words, Kishiar, who had been smiling, suddenly froze. He undoubtedly understood the meaning behind those words.

What emotions he went through today, and what thoughts he had while waiting here. He was overly frank in expressing his feelings, a bit embarrassingly so, but still, he wanted to tell him.

After a moment, the happiest smile yet spread across Kishiar’s face.

“Oh dear. I’ve made a grave mistake. I didn’t realize my assistant was feeling lonely without me. What if you had secretly shed tears in your solitude?”

“It wasn’t to that extent, but…”

“How can I just overlook such a grave sin? I’m not someone who can live with guilt. I must seek forgiveness immediately.”

“That’s not necessary to that extent…”

Just when he almost resolved never to speak of it again, the man who had grasped his hand drew him closer, pressing his lips against Yuder’s nose with a soft sound. Then, without a pause, his kisses fell like rain upon his cheeks, chin, forehead, and eyelids.

“Wait a moment… Comm…”

Yuder had no chance to protest that his weight might hurt him, as his lips continually stamped his face like a seal. Only after he gave up and calmed down did he stop and hold him tightly in his arms. Their entwined bodies shared breaths of relief.

With their gazes closely intertwined, Kishiar, half-closing his eyes and smiling, murmured,

“I wasn’t bored without you either, but that doesn’t mean I didn’t miss you.”

“…”

“To wait for a loved one is to feel such emotions.”

To wait for a loved one, that’s the feeling.

The vague emotions became clear and concrete with Kishiar’s words, seeping into Yuder’s mind. Yuder mulled over these words for a long time.

“Now, will you finally tell me what happened today? I’m ready to listen.”

“Before that, do I have to keep talking in this position?”

Yuder felt a bit peculiar speaking while half-lying on Kishiar’s chest, with his hips perched on the edge of the bed. Kishiar chuckled briefly and then loosened his embrace. He shifted slightly, moving towards the edge of the bed, and patted the blanket invitingly.

“Come up. We can sit side by side and talk.”

The time when Yuder hesitated to lie in the same bed as the Commander had long passed. Climbing onto the bed, Yuder sat beside Kishiar.

Leaning back and resting his shoulder against Kishiar’s, he was suddenly reminded of the Hail Night.

That day, just before losing consciousness, he sat with Kishiar on the muddy, blood-soaked ground, much like now. Of course, back then, Yuder couldn’t control his body properly, so their shared support was more out of necessity than anything else.

But now, they sat shoulder to shoulder, leaning against each other, not out of necessity, but simply because they wanted to. Then and now, this small contact and the warmth it brought provided Yuder with a unique sense of security.

“Today, I unwrapped my bandages and went out. I met with Enon and talked…”

Yuder began his story softly, feeling the warmth spreading from his shoulder. As he spoke all the words he had wanted to share with Kishiar upon his awakening, a bright emotion he had long forgotten slowly returned to him.

To be specific, yes, it was a feeling of joy.

Kishiar sometimes reacted as Yuder expected, and other times quite the opposite. Yuder found it amusing to see his reactions, like when he worried about Yuder’s tongue after hearing about Enon stuffing a piece of lemon

into his mouth, or when his expression turned serious at the mention of the guard from Mclara.

“Yes, I had sent an investment to the Lord of Mclara in advance. When I was planning to establish an external training base for the southern branch of the Cavalry I told him to contact me if anything happened. Mutual assistance is always beneficial.”

“So, you had done that.”

“If it weren’t for the information you provided, I wouldn’t have thought to do anything there in advance. I’m glad it was effective.”

“He might be materialistic, but he keeps his promises when money is involved.”

“So, you think Mclara is neither the beginning nor the end of this?”

“Yes, in my opinion…”

Yuder continued his narrative. When he finally spoke of seeing the enormous trap Hellem and Alik had made, Kishiar seemed quite amused.

“I’ve only heard about it, but everyone who saw it said it was incredible. It was a shame I couldn’t see it from this bedroom window.”

“It was indeed incredible. But more than that… Did you hear about Alik bringing a new magic tool and helping the other Awakeners?”

“I heard that Alik used a magic tool and that the successful candidates and members worked together, but that’s all.”

It seemed that when Kishiar received the report, it was right after the event, so relatively unimportant details were either generalized or omitted. To the Cavalry members, Alik’s new magic tool must have been impressive, but not as important as the story of the mages’ trap or the number of monsters killed.

To this day, the talk about the magic tool was dismissed as merely ‘impressive’ or ‘a new view of mages,’ with no further reaction. Yuder was the only one who realized its potential, though now there would be one more person who understood.

“In my view, the new magic tool that Alik created shouldn’t just be passed over. And neither should Alik himself.”

“Really?”

Yuder spoke frankly about the fact that such a thing didn’t exist in his previous life and his new appreciation for Alik.

“Alik is attempting to understand and use the power of Awakeners similar to, or as if it were, magic power, and he has actually created a new magic tool that yielded results. In the previous game, no mage had ever done something like that. If done right, he might pave a new path for Awakeners that has never been seen before.”

“Using the power of Awakeners like magic power…”

Kishiar stroked his chin, deep in thought. Yuder expected him to comment on Alik, but Kishiar’s response took a slightly different turn.

“Long ago, the first mage to create a magic tool theorized that it might be possible to craft similar tools using aura or divine power. Of course, due to opposition from various factions, that idea was buried.”

“Is that so?”

“That mage had boldly claimed that as long as the quality and quantity of power generated by magic were sufficient, there would be no tool that couldn’t be created. Many of his designed tools are still in use today, but some are impractical due to the lack of magic power needed to operate them and are merely kept in storage.”

Specifically, a substantial number are stored in the Orr Empire’s Imperial Library. As he said this, Kishiar smiled secretively.

“Among the legendary tools he designed were an incredibly fast carriage that runs on its own power and a door that travels through space. Isn’t that interesting?”

“…You’re thinking of showing these to Alik.”

Kishiar didn’t deny Yuder’s words. The emotions he felt were honestly conveyed in his sparkling eyes.

“Hearing about it, I’m curious to see how he would interpret them. The power of Awakeners is currently immeasurably more abundant in both quality and quantity compared to magic power.”

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Chapter 887

A carriage that ran on its own power and a door that could traverse through space. Among the abilities possessed by the Awakeners, these were all existing abilities. Abilities related to teleportation had already existed; the deceased Hosanna and the Eldore siblings had them, and they would continue to appear frequently. The power to momentarily accelerate carriages or horses to the speed of the wind was also known in Yuder's previous life.

However, if these abilities could be permanently harnessed through magic tools, what changes would ensue? Yuder couldn't fully imagine it, but if it was as Kishiar said, a tremendous transformation across the continent seemed likely. For the first time in a long while, he felt a meaningful chill run down his spine and then fade away.

'But for such a day to come…'

There were still immediate tasks to attend to.

Yuder's gaze hardened, a slight change from before, which Kishiar noticed with a smile.

"Your eyes seem resolute. What are you thinking about?"

"I'm not sure if the magic tools you mentioned can truly be created, but the prospect of witnessing a world unlike any we've seen before is exciting. That's why… I've resolved to do my part until that day comes."

"Weren't you already working diligently before?"

"It's different now. Before…"

Yuder paused mid-sentence, a fleeting epiphany crossing his mind.

'Yes, back then…'

“Previously, my focus was on preventing a repeat of the old game. But now… I yearn to see a future beyond what I know.”

Indeed, more precisely, he longed to see a future brimming with peace and new possibilities, a stark contrast to the decaying world Yuder remembered.

Was it possible for one’s heart to change so profoundly, simply by desiring to see more? The will to see the world created by Kishiar and Emperor Keilusa, who survived and not dying, were part of this. But the existence of new magic tools seemed to offer a more tangible shift in perspective.

As Yuder spoke, Kishiar nodded, seemingly understanding.

“The desire to change the past and the curiosity to see the future both provide ample motivation to live earnestly in the present. However, I suspect the latter brings more joy.”

“Joy… I see.”

This was a convincing reason. Yuder wasn’t one to optimistically speculate without basis, but this perspective was indeed more intriguing and promising.

“So, when do you plan to rise and join us? Ever and the other members are lamenting that they might forget what you look like.”

“Really? I thought everyone preferred my absence.”

Usually, subordinates prefer working without their superior. Yuder recalled his time as a Cavalry Commander; his presence often filled the members with tension, rendering them stiff and uncomfortable, hence he seldom worked alongside them. However, Kishiar was different. He was popular among the lower ranks, often disregarded by those above.

It wasn’t just his amiable personality or his leniency towards mistakes that made him popular. Kishiar was a beacon of hope and confidence for those who followed him.

Even in his previous life, when Yuder had been less attentive to the Cavalry, the shadow he cast over his members was significant. How could he say such a thing?

Yuder, suppressing the urge to speak, shook his head.

“Perhaps in other places, but the Cavalry is different.”

Kishiar’s lips curled into a mischievous smile. Despite his words, he seemed quite pleased to hear that the members missed their leader.

“Indeed. I’m actually eager to join everyone. But as you can see, I still require excessive sleep. It’s proof that my vessel has not fully recovered. Once I can reduce it to the sleep duration of an ordinary person, I plan to descend.”

“About that, I’ve fully recovered myself, so perhaps now would be a good time to examine your internals. I intended to mention this when you awoke.”

“Now?”

“Yes.”

As Yuder replied firmly, Kishiar pondered for a moment and then nodded.

“Alright. But don’t overdo it. Just a check.”

“…”

Yuder couldn’t promise that. Nevertheless, he nodded slightly and changed his position. He stepped out of the bed and placed his hand on Kishiar’s abdomen, who lay flat. Closing his eyes and following a now-familiar method, he soon felt changes in his body.

Unlike before, when dark red vein-like streaks spread over his hand as the process progressed, this time he felt a stirring power beyond his hand, reaching beneath his abdomen.

The image of the dark red veins spreading over the belly flashed in Yuder's mind.

'…Not pain, not yet. Just a flow.'

It was okay. With that thought, several colored energies surfaced over Kishiar's abdomen, spreading rapidly like a map. The speed was remarkably faster and smoother than before, which had presented some resistance as if rejecting an intruder.

Even though the process of opening up to each other had sped up over repeated interactions, this level of speed was unprecedented. Kishiar blinked in surprise.

"…It's much faster than before."

"Indeed."

It seemed that surpassing the limits of using the power of the Red Stone on the Hail Night had indeed changed his body. Not only had the total amount of power increased, but the ease and speed of handling the original form of the Red Stone's power were incomparably faster than before.

'If it's a good thing, then so be it…'

For now, the priority was to examine Kishiar's internals. Yuder cleared his mind of distractions and focused on the scene unfolding before him.

The four powers that occupied Kishiar's internals remained in the same positions as before.

The white divine power, the blue aura, the golden magic, and the red Awakener's power.

However, unlike before, when these powers maintained a semblance of balance, intertwined yet evenly spread, now each was significantly diminished and faint. As all the powers had decreased, the vessel-like heart clustered near the solar plexus had also shrunk in size, and the protective Awakener's power enveloping it was barely discernible.

‘Perhaps this is the reason for the slow recovery.’

Power tends to accumulate and recover over time. Thus, Kishiar’s assertion that recovery was merely a matter of time wasn’t entirely incorrect. However, Kishiar found himself in a peculiar situation, where the vessel, on the verge of cracking, was being protected and held together by the power of the Awakener, which he had wrapped around it using his own abilities. It seemed inadvisable for this state to persist for too long.

‘Then, perhaps replenishing the power of the Awakener first would be the better course of action.’

Kishiar himself had mentioned that any imbalance among the four powers, whether an increase or decrease in any one of them, would be problematic. But it might be more crucial to restore the power protecting the vessel. After all, a strong core is essential for any further action.

Yuder shared this line of thought with Kishiar.

“So, if you agree, Commander, I propose we contact the capital and arrange for the remaining Red Stone mediums stored in the imperial palace to be brought here as quickly as possible.”

There were several mediums left in the imperial palace, aside from those Yuder had used during the Emperor of Keilusa’s Awakening operation. If they could transfer the pure power contained within these mediums to Kishiar, it would significantly expedite the replenishment of the Awakener’s power in the vessel.

“The energy within me is part of it, but when it comes to the power of the Awakener, your judgment has never been wrong. Very well. I shall contact His Majesty immediately.”

“I’ll fetch paper and a quill for the letter.”

“No, that won’t be necessary.”

“Commander?”

“Actually, His Majesty and I have been communicating through a faster, more secret method.”

Kishiar said this and then, softening his eyebrows, he smiled playfully.

“You, of all people, should know what that means, right?”

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Chapter 888

“You, of all people, should know what that means, right?”

Of course, there was nothing else to guess. Yuder knew very well what Emperor Keilusa’s ability was.

The Emperor had the power to imbue a specific object he touched with his energy, allowing him to see and hear what happened around that object. This ability was perfect for gathering information about distant enemies or for communicating with his beloved Empress without direct contact. However, the downside was the limited duration of its use.

After training with Yuder, he began to enhance this ability, but such powers seldom leap forward rapidly. When Yuder left the capital, the maximum range of the Emperor’s ability was only around the vicinity of the capital.

‘I was sure of that… Has it developed further? Is it now possible to connect from the capital to the south?’

Seeing Yuder’s expression, Kishiar pulled something out of his pocket with the grin of a child who had succeeded in a prank. In his palm lay a small gem brooch, uncut to maintain its natural shape and dazzling in its redness. Such an exquisite item, held by someone of Kishiar’s stature, wouldn’t raise any suspicion.

“Thanks to an outstanding teacher, His Majesty’s abilities have significantly improved. I heard he’s been testing how far he can communicate with the help of others, and now, it seems, he can reach even here without issue.”

“So, does that mean… he can now see and hear everything in the Empire at any time?”

“Well, in theory, yes. But as the distance increases, it still remains difficult to see and hear ‘at any time.’ Currently, for such long distances, the imbued

energy in the object is made to last as long as possible, limiting his observation to once a day, for a very brief period.”

This meant that Emperor Keilusa had become much more precise and delicate in gauging and utilizing the amount of his power in objects. Even Yuder, who had rigorously trained him, hadn’t anticipated such rapid progress.

“His Majesty was using our communication not so much for important exchanges, but as part of his training to develop his abilities. That’s why even you were kept in the dark. He was quite embarrassed about it.”

“So… when exactly is this once-a-day opportunity to communicate with His Majesty?”

“His Majesty’s evening reading time. Since his days as a prince, he always had his own reading time in the evening after finishing his daily tasks. It’s been his pleasure.”

Emperor Keilusa, often buried in his work, could not always adhere to fixed waking, sleeping, and meal times. However, the one routine he strictly maintained was his reading time after dinner. Despite his busy life as an emperor, he always managed to find time for reading alone, showing his profound love for books.

“That time is reserved just for him, with even the chief attendant staying outside. It’s the ideal time for him to practice his ability without anyone watching. Using his long-distance ability is exhausting, and it takes him a while to recover.”

“I see.”

“It seems that time is approaching soon, if my senses are still functioning correctly.”

Even though Kishiar had woken up later than usual and was still not fully recovered, his extraordinary senses were functioning well. The man smiled

as he checked the expensive magic clock on the table and gripped the brooch tightly.

“Do you have any message for His Majesty?”

“Well… I’m relieved to see His Majesty training diligently, and I hope he doesn’t overexert himself.”

Intensifying training to foster progress is commendable. However, if one’s physical condition falls below half of the usual, it becomes challenging to respond to unforeseen emergencies. What a regrettable situation it would be if, due to training, one couldn’t exert strength in real battles.

Particularly for Emperor Keilusa, who was holding his ground in a world full of adversaries, intelligently conserving his energy was not just important, but essential.

Kishiar nodded in agreement, as if sharing this sentiment.

“Good advice. Anything else? Both His Majesty and the Empress were quite worried when they heard you had been asleep for two weeks. Her Majesty even mobilized all connections in the South to ensure that the honor of the Hero of the West was not tarnished by this incident.”

Despite Yuder’s severe injuries during the hailstorm, the fact remained unchanged: he failed to stop Hosanna and missed capturing Nahan. The Empress was reportedly the most furious when Duke Diarca’s faction tried to use this as leverage to attack.

Yuder knew that the Emperor and Empress had joined forces behind the scenes to protect the Cavalry from disgrace. However, he hadn’t realized that his own honor was also included.

‘My honor, as if that matters… I wouldn’t mind being spoken ill of.’

But he knew better now not to say such things.

So, the appropriate response would be…

“….Then, please tell His Majesty that I am now well and he needn’t worry. …And that I am truly grateful for their concern.”

It felt peculiar to be the subject of such worry and concern, not just from others but also from the Emperor and Empress. It wasn’t a bad feeling, though.

It was different from when he had helped with Emperor Keilusa’s awakening; this time, they were genuinely upset and angry for him, even though his injury was unrelated to them.

“Alright. I will convey your message. They will be pleased to hear it.”

Kishiar’s eyes sparkled.

Gauging both the landscape outside the window and the magic clock, he reached the right moment and confidently grasped the brooch, beginning to speak.

“Beloved Majesty, fortunately, I am awake at this hour and able to contact you directly. I hope you are in good health in the capital. …Not sure if you are watching, but today I have my assistant at my side. He woke up yesterday, unwrapped the bandages energetically, and even managed to take care of some outdoor tasks. He asked me to convey his sincere thanks for both Your Majesty’s and Empress’ concerns and to assure you that you need not worry anymore. Such a considerate and polite heart, isn’t it? Thinking about how envious Your Majesty must be of me for having such a capable assistant, it brightens my days.”

“…”

It had started as a proper and elegant greeting… but as the words flowed, something seemed increasingly amiss.

Yuder looked at Kishiar with a wry expression, but Kishiar’s shameless words continued unabated.

“But even if Your Majesty covets talented individuals, I would prefer not to hear any more suggestions about using this incident as an opportunity to summon my assistant to the imperial palace. I do not deny that it could be a choice beneficial for the safety of both Your Majesty and the assistant, but if that were to happen, I would be utterly devastated. If Your Majesty truly cherishes and loves me as a brother, Your Majesty would never repeat such a sorrowful suggestion. My assistant also agrees, so please understand this.”

“….Just wait a moment. Did His Majesty actually say that? When…”

The idea of selecting personnel from the Cavalry to guard the palace was not surprising, as it had been a topic of discussion before he left the capital. However, the inclusion of him as a leader in this was a different matter.

Of course, Yuder had no intention of accepting the offer, but this was the first he heard of such discussions. As Yuder looked perplexed, Kishiar winked and chuckled softly before changing the subject.

“Since Your Majesty said last time that unnecessary formalities were unwelcome, I won’t drag this out and will get straight to the point. …For the quicker recovery of my condition, I need the medium that is kept there.”

“…”

“This is based on my assistant’s assessment after examining my internal state, and I too think it’s worth a try. However, moving it here is considerably risky, so it will require discussion and ample preparation. We will send a letter soon regarding this. Please prepare in advance, Your Majesty. Until we meet again, please stay healthy.”

After finishing his speech with not a single lapse in his precise voice and pronunciation, Kishiar placed the brooch back into his pocket and exhaled.

“That should have gotten the message across. According to the last letter, the longest His Majesty can hear me is just a bit longer than now.”

“Was what you said earlier true?”

“Absolutely. While you were bedridden, out of excessive worry, His Majesty proposed sending you to the palace as a new solution, thinking it might be better for everyone.”

“I have no intention of going.”

“Right?”

Kishiar nodded, as if he had expected this response.

“Of course, I believed you would say that, which is why I mentioned it just now. His Majesty spoke out of concern, so don’t worry. It’s merely a worry, not an obligation.”

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Chapter 889

“Of course, I believed you would say that, which is why I mentioned it just now. His Majesty spoke out of concern, so don’t worry. It’s merely a worry, not an obligation.”

It was a relief, yet the newfound understanding of the Emperor’s intentions was still somewhat astonishing.

‘If he had truly intended to appoint me as the person in charge of the Imperial Palace, he must have anticipated the troublesome matters that would follow. Could he really be alright with that?’

Though such an idea was far from his mind, let’s assume for a moment that Yuder becomes the person in charge of the Imperial Palace, responsible for protecting the Emperor and the palace. Regardless of Yuder Aile being the hero of the West, this would undoubtedly cause an uproar.

The reason was simple. The current nobility of the capital likely remembered Yuder more for his audacious behavior at the last party-dancing with Duke Peletta, a man, and speaking insolently in front of Duke Diarca-than for his achievements.

Yuder speculated that Emperor Keilusa hadn’t mentioned or seemed concerned about this incident outwardly, perhaps due to his awakening and the credit he had earned, warranting a blind eye.

The appointment of Yuder Aile as the person in charge of the Imperial Palace meant publicly acknowledging him as a close confidant of the Emperor. This would signify that all the controversies he had stirred up, including being rumored as Duke Peletta’s male lover, were sanctioned under the Emperor’s name.

‘The sheer shock of such news would keep the country in uproar for at least half a year.’

The current situation of silent consent wasn't much different from an outright affirmation, but there's a significant difference between officially taking action and doing nothing. The politics of the nobility were always so.

The mere thought of how loudly Duke Diarca and the nobles would protest and launch pointless attacks if Yuder became the person in charge of the Imperial Palace was enough to give him a headache. The intelligent and rational Emperor Keilusa would surely know that in his already busy agenda, there was no need to add unnecessary tasks.

Yet, the Emperor had first expressed to Kishiar his desire to keep Yuder close. The trust that emanated from this fact was heavy, unfamiliar, and profound. It was not the kind of trust Yuder remembered existing between sovereign and vassal.

It was almost like… a level of trust and closeness one would show only to family or close kin.

Kishiar had brought up the topic nonchalantly, probably wanting to directly convey how deeply the Emperor trusted and valued Yuder.

Yuder let out a long, silent breath.

"…Suddenly, I feel the need to work even harder than before."

Kishiar didn't ask why. The smile on his face suggested he already knew the answer.

"But don't overdo it. It's only been a day since everything happened."

Yuder understood Kishiar's concern, but in a situation where Kishiar couldn't take the lead and with an imbalance already occurring, he couldn't promise not to overexert himself. Unable to lie, Yuder shifted his gaze and changed the subject.

"…By the way, I heard from Gakane earlier that currently, Sir Zuckerman is absent on a mission with Kanna, Elle, and Nipollen. May I ask what the mission is?"

“You probably already have an idea. It’s likely as you suspect,” Kishiar readily followed the change of topic, answering smoothly.

“Do you believe that Nahan is still alive, Commander?”

“In truth, I’m not completely certain. However, we’ve found traces in a specific area of the desert where Nahan is presumed to have been transferred. Bloody bandages and a piece of clothing that seems to be from an arm.”

Yuder’s eyes turned cold.

“Did Kanna confirm that those items indeed belonged to him?”

“Yes, she did. Moreover, the place where they were found is quite peculiar.”

Yuder listened as Kanna interpreted the last information of Hosanna and described the midland of the trading groups existing in the southern desert.

He hadn’t visited the southern regions in his previous life, but he vaguely remembered hearing about this midland.

“…I see. Then, as you think, Commander, it seems likely that Hosanna used the trading group managing that midland to send Nahan to his destination. I also understand why you thought it highly probable that an Awakener would be there.”

“Right. So we have to hope that those who left for that place will bring back something more concrete. And until they return, we must fervently hope that no greater calamity befalls us here.”

Yuder nodded gravely.

“Given that the strange disturbances have already reached Mclara, I think it’s only a matter of time before some disaster strikes. But… at least this falls within the range of what we anticipated, so it won’t be like the Hail Night.”

It must be different this time.

Yuder clenched his fist tightly, his face stern.

However, his serious mood was soon broken, thanks to Kishiar's relaxed invitation.

"…Well, it seems we've pretty much done all of today's work. How about we have dinner together now?"

'Dinner? Ah…'

It suddenly occurred to him that Kishiar hadn't properly had a sip of water since he woke up.

"I'm sorry. I should have prepared a meal as soon as you woke up. My thoughts were short-sighted. Let's at least get you some water…"

"It's fine. I'm not hungry. What matters more is you."

"Pardon?"

Yuder was puzzled, but Kishiar pierced through with a smiling face.

"I heard about everything that happened today, and it seems the only thing you ate was a slice of lemon given by the pharmacist, right? It's been a long time since sunset, and if that's all you've had while running around and then waiting here for me, you must be starving. Aren't you hungry?"

"…"

Kishiar was right. Since waking up, Yuder had only had the lemon Enon fed him.

He had been so busy being surrounded by others and hearing various things everywhere he went, and after coming here, he was so focused on watching Kishiar that he hadn't even felt hungry. Yuder blinked several times and then slowly opened his mouth.

"…You're right. I just realized I haven't eaten. I'm not particularly hungry…"

“See? I knew it.”

Kishiar’s eyebrows softened as he smiled.

“But this means we can eat together now, which is great. I can’t remember the last time we had a meal together.”

Thinking about it, Yuder realized it did seem like a long time. He didn’t have the memories of the past two weeks of sleep like Kishiar did, but judging by the dates, it certainly had been a while.

More than the possibility of Nahan being alive or an impending disaster, the man right in front of him not being hungry was much more important at the moment. Equally important was having a meal together with him.

In the past, Yuder Aile would never have made such a decision or thought in this way. However, the current Yuder Aile had undoubtedly changed significantly compared to before, leading him to conclude that this was now the natural priority.

Many of those he had met in his previous life had transformed into entirely different beings, and he realized he too had undergone changes, perhaps even more profound.

“How does it taste?”

Yuder had barely sent out the message when the members, working together, brought him a meal resembling a small mountain. He slowly nodded, smiling at the man’s face across from him.

“…Yes, it’s good. Please, Commander, eat a lot as well.”

In truth, there was a larger quantity of food in front of Kishiar than in front of himself, but upon reflection, it had always been that way. Kishiar always placed more food in front of Yuder, even though eating less wouldn’t have been a problem.

And Yuder, for his part, had never complained, simply consuming whatever was given to him.

While eating, he suddenly remembered a time long ago, when he still hadn't taken kindly to Kishiar's presence. He had eaten an enormous amount of dessert that Kishiar had offered him.

'It happened not just once, but several times.'

The most memorable was the incredibly large dessert tower he had eaten while staying briefly at the imperial palace after his awakening. Back then, he had simply thought he ate it because he wasn't someone who refused food that was given to him, not deeply considering why Kishiar would offer him such precious food in such large quantities.

But now, he clearly understood.

Yuder looked at the pile of fruits and soft bread in front of him and smiled faintly.

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Chapter 890

From the next day onwards, Yuder’s daily life began to flow at a pace incomparable to before. As the assistant to the Cavalry Commander, he was busy with his duties and helping with situation management. He met and spoke with the Cavalry members, who had changed after the Hail Night, adjusted training schedules, and had to meet with outsiders who had been waiting eagerly to see him.

With adjutant Nathan Zuckerman absent, Yuder was the only one qualified to meet with Kishiar and discuss business matters. Although the capable adjutant had arranged his work so that his absence would not disrupt operations, unexpected variables sometimes arose. This was especially true for contacts Yuder usually dealt with through Nathan, like the Peletta Knights and the Shuden Trading Company.

If Kishiar could stay awake as long as before, there wouldn’t have been any problems. However, that was not the case now. Consequently, Yuder began to take over Nathan’s duties as much as he could. Kishiar said it wasn’t necessary, but managing the communications with Peletta was not a significant task compared to his other duties.

Kishiar’s awake time was now mostly after sunset, and even at his best, he could only last about 5-6 hours. To make the most of this short time, Yuder handled most of his work during the day and brought only the bare minimum to discuss at night.

From Yuder’s perspective, his schedule was tighter than usual but still much more comfortable than his previous life. However, others didn’t seem to see it that way.

“Yuder… Please, delegate some of your tasks to me or Kurga. Everyone’s worried you’ll collapse as soon as you get up.”

On his way back from setting a new formal training schedule menu for the successful candidates who had been a great help, Gakane, who had been

assisting him with his duties, approached him with a distraught look.

“You don’t have to handle the training of the successful candidates yourself. Why didn’t you call me?”

“You were busy since morning too.”

“Still not as busy as you!”

Was that really the case? While Yuder’s workload was undoubtedly greater, being busy doesn’t necessarily equate to being more burdened.

‘It’s the quality that matters.’

To Yuder, such tasks were not at all strenuous, merely one of twenty light duties, with no sense of pressure. However, for Gakane, Kurga, and the other members, even their current workload was overwhelming. To Yuder, there wasn’t much difference between them and the successful candidates, so he didn’t want to add to their burden.

But being brutally honest and further disheartening someone who already looked dispirited didn’t seem right. Gakane probably knew he was struggling just to keep up with his current duties, so there was no need to bluntly point out the reality to someone who was already concerned.

“I had to oversee it myself since it was the first proper day of training. I was planning to share the load once everyone gets used to it, so just wait a bit longer.”

“Really?”

Gakane asked, half in doubt.

“If you want to take over the training duties, come and observe every day like today. That way, I might be able to hand it over sooner. But… will you be able to? I was about to finalize and hand over the new training menu for you guys.”

In the midst of this, Yuder wondered if Gakane really had the time to observe and assist with others' training. Faced with Yuder's unemotional and piercing question, Gakane swallowed hard.

"Of course… I can do it. It won't be easy, but you're doing much more. So don't worry about me!"

"Good. And don't ever skip Sir Zukerman's training."

"Of course not!"

Gakane clenched his fist and replied with determination, a smirk crossing his face.

"Ha, I finally hear you're willing to delegate something. How do you manage your stamina with all this work? Anyone would think it's us, not you, who woke up from a two-week coma."

Yuder hadn't been actively managing his stamina. He simply didn't find these tasks as demanding as he had initially thought.

Instead of a direct answer, Yuder summed it up in a single phrase.

"It's not about stamina, it's about technique."

"Technique, huh… You know we're of the same age, having joined the Cavalry at the same time, right?"

"…"

"I feel Kanna and Ever are quick learners, but you seemed like you've been at the Commander's level from the start. It's like, what, you've been doing this kind of work non-stop for a decade?"

Gakane's comment, though accurate, was meant as a joke. He wasn't seriously doubting Yuder or finding it extraordinary; too much time had passed for that.

No matter how absurd the situation, when people see and experience it daily, they quickly adapt and come to accept it as normal. Yuder's incomprehensibly efficient work and combat skills were such phenomena for the Cavalry members.

Now, the Cavalry believed quite credibly that Yuder Aile had been the secret apprentice of a reclusive Archmage before joining them. Some even speculated he might be a fallen noble in disguise, having entered their ranks as a commoner.

What they chose to believe was their prerogative. Since no one had directly asked him, Yuder let them think as they pleased. He understood they wanted to rationalize his abilities in their way. Some even earnestly believed these theories, feeling they had to protect Yuder's true identity.

Yuder chuckled at Gakane's words, responding with an unfazed demeanor.

"Add about a year to that ten-year guess. Ten years wouldn't be enough."

"What?"

Gakane burst into laughter.

"True that. Thinking about it, to learn and practice all that, ten years wouldn't cut it. Maybe add another thirty years?"

"…"

"Ah, even thirty might be tough. How about fifty years?"

Yuder suddenly stopped in his tracks. Gakane, not realizing Yuder had halted, walked a few steps further, babbling to himself before turning back.

"Yuder? What's wrong?"

"…Nothing. Just remembered something I forgot. You go ahead."

"Really? That's unusual for you to forget something. Alright, then, I'll go ahead."

Gakane, slightly puzzled, quickly bid farewell and disappeared. Yuder watched him leave, then spoke after a moment of silence.

“Come out.”

His voice slowly spread over the road near the deserted main gate.

“You don’t think I can’t see you, do you, Kiolle? If you don’t come out by the count of three….”

“Wait a minute!”

Just then, someone rolled out from behind a seemingly empty fence, screaming in panic. Kiolle, in a suspicious outfit with an oddly shaped hat and scarf almost completely covering his face, gritted his teeth and shouted with a flushed face.

“If you knew I was here, why didn’t you just call me? Why do you have to threaten me like that?!”

“It’s because you didn’t enter properly and hid in a strange place.”

“I had to hide here! If others found out I came, it would be a problem! Use your brain a bit!”

Huh. To think Kiolle da Diarca would say such a thing? This couldn’t just be overlooked. When Yuder raised his hand, Kiolle’s feet were suddenly buried deep in the ground.

“Ugh!”

“You seem to have lost a lot of fear. Maybe we should have a sparring match again.”

“No, no way! Why should I! You lawbreaker! Let me go!”

Kiolle struggled in fear. Even though he was clearly desperate not to be discovered by others, his attempt to keep his voice low and cover his face was rather pitiful.

Yuder relaxed his grip, pulling the flailing Kiolle back up. Unable to adjust to the suddenly elevated ground, Kiolle fell in a disgraceful heap. It was hard to believe he was a knight.

“So, what brings you here?”

“What brings me here? You, that time, you did that to me! Don’t you remember?!”

“…”

Did Kiolle really expect a quick and clear conversation with phrases like “you, that time”? But realizing it would be a waste of time to argue, Yuder tried to recall the incident himself.

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Chapter 891

‘According to what others have told me, Kiolle successfully rescued the Crown Prince that day and managed to escape.’

After the barrier cast by Yuder was broken, Kiolle was fortunately discovered by Kanna’s group passing by and they successfully escaped from the temple. It had been two weeks since then, and since he hadn’t seen Kanna, he couldn’t know exactly what had happened, but he heard from Kishiar that Kiolle had sent a letter to Duke Diarca. Thanks to that letter, Duke Diarca’s household abruptly abandoned their plan to attack the Cavalry.

And now.

As Yuder was recalling the information, he suddenly remembered Kiolle’s voice, full of resentment and shouting, on the day of the hailstorm.

“I’ll contact you in about a week! After I’ve escaped the clutches of that arrogant Duke of Herne! And I’ll catch those swindlers too, so just you wait!”

Hmm… Yes, that was when the sage was still alive. Right after Yuder went out to see Kiolle, he had said something about taking the Crown Prince and reporting to his father after leaving Duke Herne’s residence.

‘Of course… None of what he said actually happened,’ Yuder mused to himself.

“Are you talking about the time you said you’d contact me on the day of the hailstorm?” Yuder asked, trying to piece together his thoughts.

Kiolle’s face brightened a bit. “Yes, that’s it!”

“You said you’d contact me after a week, but it’s been much longer than that.”

“Why are you blaming me for that?! I had no news from you because you were in a coma, and even after I heard you’d woken up, you weren’t active outside, so I had no choice but to come here myself!” Kiolle exclaimed indignantly.

Yuder looked at the anxious Kiolle and nodded. “Alright, I understand. Come with me.”

“Where are we going?”

“You’re a guest who came to see me, regardless of the circumstances. We can’t just stand outside and talk.”

“What? What’s wrong with my appearance!”

“Are you asking because you don’t know?”

From the hat and scarf covering his face to the unnecessarily luxurious, garishly patterned clothes, Kiolle’s appearance was suspect. It didn’t feel like something worn to be inconspicuous but rather like a wealthy noble with a bizarre sense of aesthetics. Yuder wondered whether this was fortunate or unfortunate for Kiolle.

Continuing the conversation in such a state would draw unnecessary attention. It was better to quickly find a secluded spot inside the branch.

Kiolle grumbled under his breath, but upon catching Yuder’s glance, he flinched and hurriedly followed behind. They hadn’t walked far before they entered a busy street, where familiar faces began to greet them.

“Yuder. Did you just finish training the new recruits?”

“Do you want to join me for a meal?”

Everyone showed interest only in Yuder, ignoring the person following him. Kiolle, head bowed and shoulders hunched as if guilty, fiddled with his hat and scarf, his anxiety palpable.

“No, I can’t right now.”

“Why? Oh. You have a guest?”

“…”

“Alright then, no choice! Let’s go!”

The members who had invited Yuder for a meal gracefully withdrew and disappeared. Many continued to greet Yuder as they passed by. Initially cautious, Kiolle gradually began to realize that no one was paying attention to him, and his tense posture relaxed.

Yuder, closely followed by Kiolle, who was sneakily looking around, almost witnessed Kiolle’s clumsy moment when he nearly tripped over a stair step. Had Yuder not used his earth attribute power, Kiolle would have likely fallen flat on his face.

“Are you not paying attention?”

Kiolle gasped in response, “…”

“What’s so fascinating? It’s just people living their lives.”

Yuder hadn’t expected a real answer to his rhetorical question. So, when Kiolle replied after a moment, Yuder felt an unusual sense of surprise.

“…It’s just that there are so many people still bandaged up, yet the mood is so light.”

“What?”

“It’s strange. In the Imperial Knights, after returning from monster extermination training, we used to be so cautious around the injured that we could barely breathe. Why does everyone here seem so cheerful?”

At first, Yuder thought Kiolle was picking a fight, but Kiolle genuinely seemed perplexed. Yuder paused before giving a proper answer.

“Being downcast doesn’t make things better. Besides, we haven’t done so poorly as to warrant it.”

As he spoke, Yuder felt a strange emotion. He had thought of all his actions on the day of the hailstorm as failures, but now he was calmly explaining this to Kiolle.

But it was true.

Feeling down about failures doesn't improve the next task. And while Yuder might not know about himself, the Cavalry hadn't performed poorly enough to be dejected. There were injuries, but no serious casualties or deaths, and they had miraculously kept Charloin intact. Knowing this, none of the injured were resentful; instead, they took pride in their scars. Their support allowed Yuder to stand here and speak so confidently.

Even though he had come to terms with these thoughts after speaking with Kishiar and others, explaining it to a third party like Kiolle felt different.

Kiolle, too, listened to Yuder's words with an unusually serious expression, silently contemplating. It almost made Yuder wonder if this really was Kiolle da Diarca.

"Come in here. We won't be disturbed for a while."

Yuder opened the door to an empty reception room, checked inside, and then beckoned Kiolle in. Kiolle finally removed his scarf and hat, sighing in relief.

"So, where are you staying now? Are you still at Duke Herne's place?"

Since Duke Herne had died on the day of the hailstorm, Kiolle no longer had a reason to avoid the Duke Family as before. Considering Myra was on their side and the current busy situation, Yuder thought there was no need for Kiolle to change his lodging. However, Kiolle's answer was unexpected.

"No… I'm staying at the Imperial Knights' quarters where I was supposed to stay originally. The Crown Prince is with me."

"Really?"

“The First Princess of Duke Hern said it was fine to leave if it was uncomfortable… but with the Crown Prince here, that’s not an option.”

Yuder looked at Kiolle’s face, narrowing his eyes inquisitively.

“Are you really Kiolle da Diarca? You haven’t been brainwashed somewhere, have you?”

“What are you talking about all of a sudden?!”

“Never mind then.”

“…But actually, I did come here to talk about… brainwashing.”

“What?”

Yuder furrowed his brow at this unexpected remark. Kiolle, clutching his fist on his knee and looking down, hesitated for a while before taking a deep breath.

“I heard that the swindler died on the day of the hailstorm. Is that true?”

“I didn’t verify the body myself, but it’s true.”

The body of the sage, horrifically murdered by Diemon, had long been taken care of by the time Yuder awoke.

“But why hasn’t the Crown Prince’s behavior changed at all then?”

“What do you mean his behavior hasn’t changed? Explain clearly.”

Kiolle lifted his head, meeting Yuder’s gaze. There was a change in his demeanor, now seemingly more subdued and serious, as if he had relinquished something. He slowly began to speak.

“It’s exactly as I said. Even after waking up following the day of the hailstorm, the Crown Prince still seeks that swindler. Despite being informed of all the external news about what crimes he committed, how he died, His Highness doesn’t believe it.”

“…”

“He keeps insisting that we must save the sage, claiming that all this is a trap to slander him… Ha. The person who supposedly brainwashed him is dead, so why is His Highness still in this state? I thought you might know something.”

Though his tone was briefly interrupted by a sigh, Kiolle’s expression when mentioning the Crown Prince’s condition was notably somber and troubled. Yuder discerned a different emotion in Kiolle’s eyes, a change from before.

The look was different from when Kiolle would mindlessly worry about the Crown Prince, noisily voicing concerns about his own honor.

Kiolle appeared genuinely disheartened.

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Chapter 892

From the moment he laid eyes on him, he had his doubts. Could this really be the same foolish Kiolle he knew? But now, seeing his face, it was hard to just let it go.

‘There’s more to it than just the Crown Prince’s strange condition… I’m sure of it.’

Before continuing the conversation, Yuder felt the need to confirm. Crossing his arms, he broke the silence.

“You. What else happened with the Crown Prince?”

“…What? Why would you ask that out of the blue? I’ve already told you, His Highness is…”

“Had you been your usual self, you would’ve berated me for merely referring to him as the Crown Prince, claiming it disrespectful. It seems you do want to talk about the Crown Prince’s condition, but you don’t appear particularly worried. It’s odd, isn’t it? Normally, you wouldn’t come here unless summoned.”

“Considering everything, my conclusion is that something more happened on the day of the hailstorm. Correct me if I’m wrong.”

“…”

“….Hic.”

Unexpectedly, a suppressed hiccup escaped Kiolle’s lips. It seemed Yuder’s words had struck a nerve.

“Ah, no, you weren’t even there… How could you possibly know…!”

‘His inability to hide his feelings and expressions makes it all too obvious.’

Kiolle must have started to see him, Yuder Aile, as more of a monster than before, but from Yuder's perspective, it was Kiolle who was being too naive. Despite some changes, Kiolle was still Kiolle.

"Ha, fine. Something did happen that day. I didn't want to speak of it, out of shame, but…"

"No need to be surprised that you still feel shame. Just tell the story."

"You…! One day, I'll relish seeing you fall because of that arrogant mouth of yours!"

Yelling with a face that longed to curse, Kiolle sighed deeply, covering his face with his hands. A faint voice slipped through his fingers.

"…What?"

"I was hit."

"You were hit… by the Crown Prince?"

"And who else would it be?!"

Realistically, Kiolle could overpower not just the newly accepted members of the Cavalry, but even the formidable Peletta Knights. However, actually striking Duke Diarca's son was a different matter.

Yuder Aile had no qualms about dealing with Kiolle, but for others, it was a different story. And for Katchian, who had become the Crown Prince with the backing of the Diarca family, the situation was the same. As long as he was aligned with Duke Diarca, Kiolle, though seemingly inferior in status, could never be openly disrespected.

It wasn't a matter of exploiting a weakness like knowing his secret relations or something like that, but to have laid hands on him directly…

"Exactly how were you hit?"

“That day, before escaping the temple with the Cavalry, His Highness was already awake. Naturally, he sought out the swindler. Despite my pleas to return quickly due to the dangerous hailstorm, he wouldn’t listen. Then, suspecting me, he slapped my cheek…”

Kiolle paused, biting his lip, before continuing his tale.

“…And then, if I didn’t kneel and apologize, he vowed never to forgive me, continuously kicking my legs… Ha.”

“You just took it without fighting back?”

“What else was I supposed to do in that situation? After all, he is the one I serve!…”

Kiolle burst out in frustration, but his voice lacked its usual strength.

“Besides, he was… brainwashed, and… I was the only one there, and I am his personal guard…”

Even with his face half-covered and his head bowed, Kiolle’s feelings of confusion and humiliation from that time were palpable.

‘Considering Katchian was still brainwashed at the time… Slaps and kicks. I understand why Kiolle was so shocked.’

Slapping and kicking. While these acts might be minor in terms of physical damage, they are exceptionally effective in demeaning and humiliating someone. Having seen Emperor Katchian in his previous life lash out at his servants in a similar manner when he was at his most irritable, Yuder could easily imagine the scene.

Servants might have no choice but to endure such treatment, but Kiolle is different.

‘A guy who, except for me, probably never had his hair touched by anyone else.’

Yuder couldn’t say Kiolle was a good person, but he had tried his best to fulfill his role as a loyal personal guard. That foolish fellow had even collaborated earnestly with him to protect the Crown Prince and his father from the dangers of brainwashing. It’s hard to say whether his cooperation was greatly helpful, but there’s no denying that he was sincere in his actions.

Until now, Katchian had thought Kiolle was a homosexual, using it as leverage to make him obey. His stubbornness in covering up their escape from the palace wasn’t incomprehensible if one considered the Crown Prince a victim of brainwashing.

But for Kiolle, who had risked his life in the dangerous temple to save the Crown Prince, to be repaid with such insulting distrust.

‘Anyone would cool their head and come to a realization.’

Yuder began to understand why Kiolle had gone through the trouble of coming here.

He wanted confirmation.

Whether the Crown Prince’s condition was indeed due to brainwashing and thus understandable, or not.

What had happened that day, and what he should do moving forward.

And perhaps, something else as well.

Taking a deep breath, Yuder spoke.

“Being a personal guard doesn’t normally include enduring such treatment from your lord.”

“…”

“So, how did you feel about it? If I tell you that the Crown Prince still seems to be under brainwashing, would you accept that and leave it at that?”

“I am…”

Kiolle hesitated for a long time before finally murmuring in a low voice.

“…Perhaps, His Highness… might not be the person I, or our family, thought he was. That’s why I wanted a clear answer from you…”

“…”

“…I don’t know. The things His Highness did this time were just too…”

Kiolle struggled to continue, biting his lip.

“Firstly, I owe you for saving my life this time, so I came out of my quarters after the day of the hailstorm and told my father everything honestly. Naturally, he was furious. I’ll probably be taken to the capital soon, but… I felt like I had to see you before that. That’s why I came.”

“…”

“I’ve said all I need to! Now it’s your turn to say something helpful!”

Yuder looked at Kiolle, who was red-faced and seething with frustration, and pondered.

‘Could this guy possibly be the key to dismantling the alliance between Crown Prince Katchian and the Diarca family?’

Yuder remembered Katchian La Orr as cunning and tenacious. He had ascended to the throne, pretending to be a loyal puppet of the Diarca family, content with his position while secretly gathering the power to overturn them over the years. The Cavalry and Yuder himself were among the forces he had nurtured in the shadows.

In this life, though Katchian’s early attempt to break free from the Diarca had gone awry, altering many aspects, he ultimately accepted Kiolle as his personal guard, seemingly reconciling. The Diarca family and Katchian, after all, depended on each other for legitimacy and power in their current positions.

Emperor Keilusa and Kishiar might not lose in a direct confrontation against them, but as long as the Diarca family ‘rightfully’ held the position of Crown Prince, they would always have the upper hand.

But what if, before Yuder and his side make their move, the Diarca’s inner circle starts to rot and crumble?

What if, like the sage and Nahan who created the Star of Nagran, they begin to distrust and despise each other, reaching a point of irreconcilable differences?

‘A small external tremor like this one could easily cause their downfall.’

Despite the absolute advantage of legitimacy and superiority they gain by sticking together, the final blow could come from mutual distrust. The key. An internal blade.

It was absurd, but perhaps Kiolle, right here, might play that role in the Diarca’s downfall.

‘Well, considering using him in such a way is probably just wishful thinking.’

Yuder, having organized his thoughts, began to speak.

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Chapter 893

‘Well, considering using him in such a way is probably just wishful thinking.’

Yuder, having organized his thoughts, began to speak.

“To answer what you were curious about first, most of the powers Awakeners exhibited disappear after their death. Those who were brainwashed by Karl Enfile, who called himself a sage, are now almost completely free from his influence.”

“Ah…”

The Awakeners from the Star of Nagran, who were captured and confined during the hailstorm, appeared dazed as if waking from a long dream. They remembered their actions clearly but couldn’t comprehend the blind zeal they had felt at the time.

“I did those things, yes, but now I can’t understand why I went to such lengths. Back then, it felt like I had to obey the sage’s words unconditionally….” This was a common statement among them. Some vehemently denounced the sage, desperately trying to distance themselves from their past actions, something they never would have done under his control.

“Wait. So, almost everyone is free from the brainwashing, but not everyone?”

Kiolle asked nervously, eyes darting around. Yuder smiled faintly, lifting one corner of his mouth.

“Quite perceptive. You’ve become smarter since learning to repay kindness, huh?”

“What?!”

“That’s right. There are still some who aren’t free yet.”

Kiolle, who was about to get angry, calmed down quickly upon hearing Yuder’s words.

“You mean there are still some left?”

While most Awakeners from the Star of Nagran had begun to reject the sage and defend themselves, not all had done so. A tiny minority, who hadn’t witnessed the sage’s death with their own eyes, doubted the Cavalry and refused to cooperate with the investigation.

These were not the ones recently captured but those who had been taken earlier, managing the southern base with Sera.

And there were two more, Langbarton and Ella, who had been living in the capital with the sage, captured in his stead, and had even attempted self-harm after his death. According to reports from Steiber, the sole Deputy Commander in the capital, Ella seemed confused but accepting of the sage’s death, while Langbarton appeared entirely unreachable. Yuder thought that Langbarton’s condition closely mirrored that of Crown Prince Katchian.

“So, even after that swindler dies, the brainwashing can still continue?!”

“It’s somewhat different than that.”

“How so?”

“Do you know where those who are less affected by the brainwashing are being held?”

“How should I know?!”

“To put it simply, they’re in a prison where Awakeners can’t use their powers.”

Indeed, the place where the Awakeners from the Star of Nagran, captured along with Sera, were held was none other than a space enveloped by Reneve’s power. Reneve’s space primarily suppressed the abilities of the

Awakeners held within, but it also had some effect in easing the brainwashing that had already taken hold.

This was evident from the fact that those who had been brainwashed by the sage found it increasingly easier to talk about him while inside. The question remained, why some of the brainwashing seemed unbroken, especially considering these individuals had been captured much earlier than those who had been with the sage until his death.

Yuder found the reason in the memories of his past life.

Even after the death of the false sage Diemon in his previous life, some of his followers still acted in accordance with the sage's teachings and harbored hatred towards Yuder, who had captured and killed him. Emperor Katchian, despite acknowledging Diemon's wrongdoings, had noticeably changed his attitude towards Yuder and never returned to his former self until his death.

Was this merely because the insignificant power of the dead Diemon had not vanished?

No. Yuder shook his head.

"It's not that the brainwashing hasn't been lifted. They just don't want to accept the truth."

"…"

"Initially, the change in people was due to brainwashing, but the extent to which they could change depended on their own mental strength. You understand what I mean, don't you?"

Before Yuder's cold, subdued voice, Kiolle fell silent, as if frozen.

Despite having been brainwashed, someone like Nahan had continually doubted the sage and eventually freed himself. Those who, after being brainwashed, failed to become important enough to retain the sage's attention, were able to quickly escape his influence.

‘The Awakeners that the sage brought in at the end must fall into that category. Those who were too weak and lacked significant abilities to leave the base village until the very end.’

But what about Langbarton and Ella, captured in the capital, and Sera, who had earned the sage’s trust enough to manage the southern base, and those who came with her? They were highly regarded within the group for their combat prowess and useful abilities. The sage valued them highly, interacted closely, and they, in turn, followed him blindly.

They were content and happy in their state, never questioning the sage, taking comfort in their existence.

Even after the brainwashing ability was broken, they couldn’t accept this fact.

If those affected don’t wish to free themselves from their state, how could they change?

“If the Crown Prince appears unchanged, it’s now his will, not brainwashing.”

“Bu… but….”

“Well. If you think I’m wrong, that’s fine too.”

But Kiolle’s clenched expression seemed to reluctantly acknowledge the truth in Yuder’s words.

Accepting the harsh reality that lies before one, stepping out from a state of comfort and happiness, is difficult. This is especially true for those who are well aware of the deeds they committed during their ‘happy’ times.

In his previous life, Emperor Katchian La Orr must have longed for the days when he lived dependent on the sage’s words and did not wish to break free from them. To him, Yuder Aile, dragging him back to reality and spouting madness, must have seemed a deeply resented figure.

Yuder silently swallowed a cold laugh.

The brainwashing ability had already disappeared. If one does not realize and refuses to change, not even ten power suppression wielders like Reneve could make a difference.

“Anyway, yes. You did well to report the truth to Duke Diarca. It’s time for the Duke’s side to understand the Crown Prince’s condition correctly.”

“…”

“What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Oh, no… I did it because I thought the same. But, you, you, you daring to tell me I did well…!”

Kiolle, who had been staring dumbfoundedly, stumbled over his words in severe embarrassment.

“Do you think I should be evaluated by you?! I am not your subordinate!”

“Should I say you did poorly then?”

“You just said I did well?!”

Displeased whether praised or criticized, Kiolle seemed perplexed. Yuder had only commented on what seemed like a rare instance of rational action from Kiolle, considering their collaborative efforts so far, but couldn’t fathom his reaction.

Yuder decided to ignore Kiolle’s protests and stick to his intended message.

“Anyway. Has Duke Diarca’s side informed you that they’ll come for you? When you go, be careful not to blab about the Cavalry, and make sure to come up with good excuses for your collaboration with me. If they find out you’ve been saying unnecessary things… you know the consequences.”

“…”

“Try not to delay and return as soon as possible. This place will soon become more dangerous than before.”

“What? What do you mean by that?”

“Exactly what I said. You don’t need to know more. I’m busy, so I’ll leave first.”

“Uh? Wait!”

Surprised by Yuder’s abrupt departure, Kiolle hurriedly stood up as well.

“Wait a minute!”

“What now?”

“You, that… You were supposedly severely injured and out of contact for over two weeks! Seeing you walking around like this, was that all a lie?!”

“Why would I need to lie about something like that?”

“Because you look too unharmed! Do you know how hard it was for me to decide to come here…! Being fine and not contacting…!”

What’s with this guy? Narrowing his eyes, Yuder looked at Kiolle and retorted.

“Are you trying to say you were worried about me?”

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Chapter 894

“Are you trying to say you were worried about me?”

“Who, me? Worried about you? Don’t be absurd! You’re getting too arrogant just because people call you a hero, thinking you can reach the heavens!”

Why would I worry about someone like you! Kiolle screamed in horror. It seemed ridiculous to think otherwise, but if it wasn’t the case, it would have been a relief.

“Good. I’m glad it’s not the case.”

Kiolle finally shut his mouth at the crisp response. But his furrowed face was filled with irritation and dissatisfaction. It was unclear what was bothering him, but he was certainly a nuisance.

Yuder looked at the slightly disheartened Kiolle and clicked his tongue quietly.

“If you’re not confident about going outside alone, I’ll show you the way. Just follow me.”

“…I never said that.”

Kiolle mumbled, avoiding eye contact. However, the fact that he quickly followed Yuder, grabbing his hat and scarf, suggested he was indeed afraid to go back alone.

The outside was quieter than before, probably because it was lunchtime.

‘That’s good. I can just send him out through the back door.’

“You… The thing you said earlier about this place becoming more dangerous. Is that true?”

Kiolle, who was following more boldly than when he entered, suddenly asked. Yuder didn’t even turn his head and responded in a flat tone.

“What if it is true? I told you to mind your own business and return to the capital quickly.”

“No! You’ve dealt with all the monsters that appeared during the hailstorm, but I can’t understand why it would become more dangerous!”

Kiolle retorted indignantly.

“I am a member of the Imperial Knights, guarding the capital, and a personal guard to His Highness the Crown Prince. I am a person with the privilege of speaking directly with my father, Duke Diarca, anytime! If something is truly happening in the south, it’s only right to share that information for the public good!”

“…”

It seemed the world was really coming to an end. To think that this fool had such impressive titles and power.

Yuder stopped walking and turned his head. Kiolle tensed his shoulders but did not avert his gaze. His eyes looked serious, so Yuder decided to give him a proper answer instead of dismissing him.

“Alright, fine. What you’re saying is technically correct. If a danger threatens the south, it’s right to ask for help from everyone who has a duty to protect the country.”

“But?”

“Do you think the Imperial Knights, the Crown Prince, and your father would readily help if they heard news of a crisis in the south?”

Kiolle’s eyebrows twitched.

“If there’s sufficient evidence and information… and if I say it… they’ll believe me.”

“Evidence, huh… Ever since the day of the hailstorm, similar strange cracks have been appearing and disappearing throughout the south.”

“I haven’t heard of any monsters appearing, though?”

“That’s the point. The cracks keep being spotted without any monsters emerging.”

Kiolle looked perplexed. If cracks appeared without monsters, it was unclear what the danger was.

“Where are these cracks? It must be a mistake. Even if it’s not, isn’t it better that no monsters are coming out?”

“Exactly. I knew you’d say that.”

From the beginning, Yuder had no expectations. He couldn’t count how many times he had heard words like Kiolle’s in his past life. Even Yudrain Aile had only begun to properly acknowledge and investigate these cracks after the Southern Earthquake occurred.

The fact that Kishiar immediately believed and reacted to his words was the anomaly.

“What do you want me to do! Explain why it’s a sign of danger! I need to understand before I can believe and pass it on!”

Kiolle, sounding almost like he was throwing a tantrum, disrupted the chilling wind swirling through Yuder’s mind. Yuder stared intently at Kiolle, who was biting his lips tightly.

‘This is unexpected.’

If he didn’t believe, he could have simply dismissed it as nonsense, but Kiolle surprisingly asked for more detailed information. In Yuder’s previous life, hardly anyone had reacted that far.

When he thought about it, Kiolle Diarca wasn’t even in this world when disasters and calamities began in his previous life. And whether he liked it

or not, he was a man who had sworn to assist Yuder.

‘Right. Whether he likes it or not…’

A light slowly returned to Yuder’s empty eyes.

“Have you ever heard that animals sense danger and evacuate before a massive earthquake occurs?”

“What?”

Confused by the sudden question, Kiolle responded with a scrunched nose.

“I’m a knight; I don’t know about these things!”

“Proud of being ignorant? Study a bit. If you don’t know, ask someone.”

Kiolle clenched his fist and trembled. However, knowing it was true, he refrained from retorting against him.

“Anyway, I can’t go into excessive detail, but my Commander and I believe that the events on the Hail Night and the strange cracks occurring since then are all signs of an even greater impending disaster. If we’re right, these strange cracks will continue to occur more frequently.”

“A greater disaster? An earthquake?”

“Yes, something like that. You might not understand what an earthquake is, but reacting after it occurs is already too late, especially here in the south.”

“Why?”

“The south has many cities and towns right beside the sea. When an earthquake occurs, it’s not just the land that shakes, but also the sea bed. Then, what happens?”

“…I told you I’m a knight!”

“Even when using a sword, it’s basic to use your head, isn’t it?”

“…”

“Well, anyway, if the land under the sea also shakes, what happens is… the entire sea gets agitated. Naturally, waves will form.”

Waves as massive as none in the empire had ever seen.

Those who had never seen it couldn’t even begin to imagine. Yuder, though he hadn’t seen it himself, vividly remembered what the south looked like after such a wave had swept through.

A horrific sight of everything crumbling, washed away and rotting under the water.

A tranquility as if destruction loomed imminent.

“I’m not sure, but… if an earthquake occurs and huge waves hit the southern cities by the sea, it can be dangerous. So, the sign… the cracks… like animals evacuating… It means there’s something, and you guys want to respond to it, right?”

“Yes. We don’t just want to respond; we’re already preparing. This is all the evidence and information you asked for. Can you still go back and pass it on? It’s just information from the Cavalry, whom you don’t even get along with, right?”

“…”

Yuder had expected Kiolle to retreat in disbelief.

‘After all, there’s the oath. If something compelling enough happens that could silence Duke Diarca, I can use Kiolle for that. That should be sufficient.’

“…You think I can’t do it.”

However, the response he received was unexpectedly different from what he had anticipated. Kiolle, clenching his fist as if to crush it, glared at Yuder and spoke.

“If I refused, you would have just threatened me with that damn oath and made me do it anyway! You’re testing me, aren’t you!”

It was a series of replies Yuder hadn’t foreseen in any of his predictions. As Yuder blinked in rare perplexity, Kiolle snorted loudly.

“Wait! I, Kiolle Diarca, will return to the capital, look into everything myself, and then contact you!”

“What are you planning to investigate?”

“Why should you care!”

“No. Maybe it’s better if you just retract what you just said. I’d rather not have you do something unnecessary and make things more troublesome for me.”

“Don’t joke! You arrogant…”

Kiolle, seemingly about to say something more, bit his lip and suppressed his anger. His gaze tracked towards the Cavalry members in the distance. Among them were those who had protected Kiolle during the Hail Night.

Kiolle looked at them and spoke with difficulty.

“…I am also a Knight! A Knight of the Imperial Knights is someone who swears to protect the Empire. I’ve always been proud of that.”

“…”

“I’m going.”

Before Yuder could say anything, Kiolle pulled his scarf up to cover his face and dashed off, disappearing from sight. Yuder quietly watched the spot where he had vanished.

‘…That’s the opposite direction of the exit. He’ll probably get lost and come back soon.’

It was absurd, but somehow, he felt strange.

Yuder looked up at the clear sky. A faint, wry smile escaped his lips.

‘Kiolle, of all people, making me laugh.’

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Chapter 895

“Yuder, have you heard? The people from the Imperial Knights sent by Diarca to watch us have all withdrawn.”

“Yes.”

“Ah, you already knew?”

Not long after, Kiolle departed. The Diarca House had hoped their youngest son would impress Duke Peletta and the Herne Family by defeating the members of the Cavalry. Unfortunately, none of their expectations were met.

The only solace, perhaps, was Kiolle’s quiet handling of the brainwashed Crown Prince’s misdeeds, but even that relief was short-lived. Just before Kiolle’s party arrived in the capital, Emperor Keilusa detonated a metaphorical bomb, having waited for the right moment.

Where has the Crown Prince, who vowed to investigate those who dared to invade the Imperial Palace, gone? Can we really entrust responsibility to someone who abandons his post without a sense of duty?

The Emperor had feigned ignorance of the Crown Prince’s absence, biding his time for this moment. Duke Diarca might have thought that the Emperor would soon restore the Crown Prince’s image, but Emperor Keilusa was already aware of their ulterior motives.

At the moment when Duke Diarca felt most secure, the Emperor loudly proclaimed the Crown Prince’s unauthorized departure from the palace across the nation. The young Crown Prince might have ventured out of curiosity, but the issue was that he had been tasked with capturing the intruders at the Sun Palace.

The Crown Prince, having taken on an important public duty, left his post without informing the Emperor and Empress. Moreover, it had been days

since he left the palace, and the Diarca House kept silent, causing a stir in the imperial nobility.

The topic of imperial responsibility was always a potent one.

Emperor Keilusa, who had suffered under the weight of responsibility for not producing an heir and for his chronic illness preventing him from appearing in public, knew this better than anyone. His efforts to adopt a capable heir instead of a biological child, and his management of state affairs despite not being publicly active, were always overshadowed by this responsibility.

In the past, the reason Emperor Keilusa even became the Crown Prince was due to the health issues of Prince Kishiar, which had brought the topic of responsibility to the forefront.

Now, it was time for Duke Diarca, who had once been vocal critics of the Emperor, to taste their own medicine. In the past, the Four Great Duke Houses would unite in such situations, but this time, there was no one to support them.

After casting doubt on whether the irresponsible Crown Prince was fit for his position, the Emperor did not hesitate to praise the Cavalry and General Gino, along with the people in the southern part of the Empire, for their heroic deeds in protecting the nation.

Their responsible actions in rebuilding the South signify the reconstruction of the Empire itself. May all those with purpose contribute to the South's restoration.

By condemning the Crown Prince's irresponsible actions and then making such a statement, the Emperor boldly sent resources and manpower to the South, leaving Duke Diarca with no grounds for opposition. Moreover, they were compelled to offer resources for the South's aid, seemingly to appease the deeply upset Emperor.

Many were surprised that this was the first time since Emperor Keilusa's ascension that Duke Diarca did not oppose the Emperor's will. It signified

the severity of the Crown Prince’s actions.

And so, as everyone’s attention was focused on the power struggle unfolding in the capital, the Herne Family and the Cavalry, having received supplies and manpower, began to exhibit a slightly unusual activity.

“Come on! Stack it higher! Higher!”

“Aaaah!”

With thunderous shouts, the uniformed individuals exerted their strength in unison. Enveloped in an invisible force, massive stones soared through the air, landing neatly atop the high wall. They were constructing the wall in front of the port that covered a third of Charloin.

Passersby halted in their tracks, astonished by the immense height of the wall, easily surpassing a two-story building.

Children clapped their hands in amazement at witnessing such power for the first time, while the elders were too busy adding their commentary.

A merchant, passing by at that moment, widened his eyes in disbelief.

“Good heavens, what is all this? Are they Awakeners?”

“What? Is this your first time here?”

“Yes, I just arrived yesterday… but what is all this?”

An elderly onlooker, hands clasped behind his back, chuckled and explained to the merchant.

“Charloin recently suffered greatly due to monsters. Can you believe it rained monsters from the sky, hundreds of them?”

“I heard there was some damage, but rain… I’m not sure.”

“That’s right. But we hardly lost any precious lives. All thanks to those people over there. They’re followers of the great General Gino and the wise

Duke Peletta.”

“Ah… the Cavalry, right? The Awakener group?”

“Not just the Cavalry. There are others following General Gino now. They are quite remarkable.”

The elder, who had been proudly discussing the Cavalry and the Imperial Army’s Special Forces, smiled as he watched more stones rise.

“When the monster attack and hailstorm destroyed our breakwater here, the Cavalry volunteered to rebuild it. They promised to make it last at least 500 years. It doesn’t cost us a dime or any effort, so we can only be grateful.”

“I see…”

The merchant finally understood the purpose of the high wall. It was a breakwater to protect against high tides.

“Is it okay to build the breakwater so high?”

“Why not? The South hardly gets rain, but the land is lower than the water level. When it rains, the whole city could flood. We always wanted something like this… I’m glad to see it in my lifetime.”

The old man then began praising the First Princess of the Herne House, who had decisively contributed to the breakwater’s construction. Despite losing her father in a tragic way, she tirelessly worked for the South, and the old man’s expression was filled with pride as he spoke about the young future Duchess.

“That’s impressive indeed.”

“Indeed, it is. If they relied only on human strength, it wouldn’t have been built so quickly. The power of the Awakener is truly remarkable.”

With the old man’s smile, more boulders soared into the sky.

The merchant moved away from the breakwater construction site and walked down the street. Charloin had always been a bustling port city, but it also had the air of a city of pleasure.

However, today's Charloin was different in many ways.

The streets no longer had people drinking and promoting illegal fighting rings. People walked confidently, their faces bright, hard to believe that the city had recently been attacked by a horde of monsters. Soldiers and knights maintaining order seemed to be more disciplined than ever.

Could this really be the same city he had visited before? The merchant, puzzled, headed towards a tavern that was open from the early hours. As he approached, he overheard some patrons conversing.

"Hey, did you hear? Another strange crack appeared in Mclara. Soldiers came and went."

"They saw it in Sluban and Alsara too."

"I thought we might have to leave the South… but somehow, it doesn't seem necessary now."

"With the Cavalry and soldiers patrolling the streets and inspecting buildings every day, where else could be safer than here?"

"Yeah, maybe that's why."

People laughed heartily and clinked their glasses. The merchant's face, momentarily altered by the mention of strange cracks, soon returned to an expressionless state.

Sitting alone in a corner, sipping beer, he attracted no particular attention. The merchant listened to the conversations around him while he finished his beer. Then, he placed a scrap of paper on the table and scribbled a message with a piece of charcoal.

The atmosphere here is unlike anything we had anticipated. The land still trembles with imbalance, but the people are not anxious; the streets brim

with hope. We have yet to find any trace of Aton. Everyone speaks of the Cavalry as the reason for all this.

Having written thus far, the merchant paused briefly before adding one last sentence.

Could they possibly know what might happen due to the imbalance? I can't believe Aton would betray us, but that's the only feeling I get from the current situation. Anyway, I will continue to monitor the response.

The merchant finished his beer, folded the paper, and tucked it into his pocket. He then stepped outside and gave a short whistle.

A carrier pigeon swiftly descended onto his hand. The merchant attached the note to the bird's leg and sent it off before looking back.

In his view, the Cavalry's southern branch loomed in the distance.

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Chapter 896

At the same time, Yuder Aile was meeting guests on behalf of the Commander.

“The crack was also sighted in Tuban.”

“Yes. At first, we thought it was a mere illusion since nothing significant occurred after the sighting. However, our lord became deeply concerned after hearing similar incidents occurred in other regions. Hence, I was dispatched here.”

Tuban. It was the last of the four areas of concern that Yuder and Kishiar had reviewed together. While the other three had reported in early, Tuban remained silent, even as one by one, reports of unusual cracks emerged from neighboring regions. Eventually, unable to hold back any longer, they sent someone.

This showed that Tuban’s lord, despite his well-known pride and stubbornness, could not overlook the advantages that other regions were gaining by dealing with these strange cracks.

Yuder, feeling a sense of satisfaction with how things were unfolding, replied calmly without showing his inner delight.

“I see.”

“I’ve heard that the Cavalry, First Princess Myra of the Herne Duchy, and the Imperial Southern Army have sent reinforcements to Mclara, Sluban, and Alsara to assist with security… Do you think Tuban should receive the same?”

The envoy from Tuban couldn’t hide his true intentions. Despite being the last to arrive, he transparently revealed his desire for the same support that other regions had received.

Of course, Yuder knew it was necessary for the future, but his nature didn't allow him to easily yield to such greedy demands.

"Well, we'll see about that."

"Excuse me?"

As Yuder leaned back languidly on the sofa, staring impassively, the young envoy from Tuban, who had been looking down on the Cavalry, showed a flustered expression. The Cavalry members, standing behind him, silently exchanged glances and smirked.

'How dare he think it's that easy to get what he wants.'

'Yuder's at it again. That guy will definitely leave crying. Maybe we should prepare a handkerchief for him in advance.'

As they anticipated, after a brief moment, the envoy from Tuban, drenched in what seemed to be a mix of sweat and tears, left the office, drained. Though he managed to secure the desired support, the cost involved actions that the lord of Tuban would certainly not appreciate. Was it really a gain?

Yuder knew Tuban's situation too well to refuse, and even casually mentioned the name of First Princess Myra El Herne, making it impossible for the envoy to decline. Watching the envoy's retreating figure, Yuder let out a cold laugh internally.

'I'll give them what they need, but they shouldn't underestimate the Cavalry.'

The lord of Tuban, in his previous life, hindered the Cavalry several times with his noble-class mentality. This time, Yuder intended to break his spirit right from the start.

Such people only heed when shown a lesson. Now that they've been put in their place, from now on, those who came in confidently, thinking they would end up like Mclara, will at least try to be polite.

"Do I have any more appointments today?"

“No, there weren’t any until a while ago… but someone unexpected visited while you were meeting the envoy from Tuban.”

“Who?”

“It’s me.”

Answering Yuder’s question was General Gino, appearing at the doorway. Dressed much more casually than before, the general, without his adjutant Meghna, showed a gentle smile.

“I heard you regained consciousness, but I was worried not having seen you in person. I’m glad to see you in good health. Have you been well?”

“Of course, General. Had you informed us in advance, we would have sent someone to escort you.”

“No need. It’s proper for me to come and wait since I’m the one with a matter to discuss. Why trouble busy people when my own two legs serve me well? Sometimes, with age, one desires to converse with the youth.”

His words were light, yet the underlying meaning was not so.

‘He emphasizes his coming alone for a reason, certainly.’

Yuder inferred that the General’s matter required secrecy and gestured subtly. The Cavalry members guarding the interior were dismissed, and the door was closed, leaving only General Gino and Yuder inside.

Yuder gestured lightly towards the door, using the power of wind to block any sound, and then spoke.

“Now, no one outside can hear our conversation. Please, speak freely.”

“I’ve heard you are barely twenty… It’s hard to believe. At your age, I loathed the responsibility of my family so much that I ran away with just a sword in hand.”

“…”

“If only someone like you had appeared sooner. But it seems God hasn’t completely forsaken us. Before my death, I am fortunate to see someone like you and the Cavalry.”

“Your praise is too generous.”

“Not at all. Everyone who saw you and the Cavalry on the day of the hailstorm would think so.”

After speaking, General Gino paused to catch his breath. His eyes, usually not sparing with praise, darkened.

“But… is the Commander of the Cavalry well? I heard through letters he is recovering….”

“Yes. He is currently avoiding contact with the outside for various reasons, but there is no need for concern. He will recover soon.”

“That’s a relief. I was genuinely worried if his condition was more serious than reported.”

A sincere look of relief appeared around the General’s wrinkled eyes.

“After the hailstorm, the Cavalry seems to be preparing for more than just the simple reconstruction of Charloin. They are also putting notable effort into securing law and order, gathering information on the strange cracks that appeared in the neighboring cities.”

“…”

“I haven’t heard the details, but I suspect you all might be anticipating that the chaos of the hailstorm and the preceding disturbances are not the end. That’s why I offered support from the Imperial Army without asking anything.”

Indeed, General Gino was perceptive. Yuder felt admiration for this person he met in this life, in a similar yet completely different way to Kiolle.

“…Indeed, General. As you’ve surmised.”

“Just as I thought… it’s not over yet… If you cannot speak in detail yet, I won’t pry. If Duke Peletta, no, the Commander of the Cavalry, has judged so, there must be valid reasons and causes. And that would also be in line with His Majesty the Emperor’s wishes.”

Yuder silently affirmed, then spoke.

“Is that the only reason you’ve come all this way?”

“Of course not. I wanted to hear about Duke Peletta’s health directly from you, but I also have a troubling matter I wish to discuss. This is actually the main reason.”

A troubling matter. Yuder guessed that this was precisely why General Gino had come alone.

‘Well, deducing that isn’t too difficult.’

Yuder had already speculated with Kishiar about the potential problems within the Southern Army. After the day of the hailstorm, it seemed General Gino had also noticed something amiss.

“Could this troublesome matter be related to certain individuals within the Southern Army?”

“…How did you know?”

General Gino asked in a low voice.

“Has the Cavalry already…?”

“As you might remember, General, when we first met in the East, a lot happened. Some of those events remain unexplained. We have been keeping an eye on the internal affairs of the Southern Army since then.”

He should have mentioned that it was actually Kishiar and Emperor Keilusa who had been monitoring, but he refrained from going into that detail.

Though Yuder hadn't explicitly stated it, his words alone were enough for General Gino to realize that Yuder truly understood his concerns. The General exhaled sharply and opened his eyes, a tension crossing his face.

"So it is… I see. Then I'll cut to the chase. After the hailstorm, I began to suspect that things beyond my control were happening within the Southern Army."

General Gino's suspicion had turned into conviction during the post-hailstorm clean-up.

"I don't know if you're aware, but I sustained minor injuries during the hailstorm. While I was recovering, I entrusted full authority to Meghna, my adjutant. But then, suspicious assassination attempts against her started to occur as if she wasn't meant to be in that position."

"Assassination attempts, you say?"

"I didn't report it officially at first. I thought it was an internal matter that needed to be settled."

Initially, they seemed like accidents. But the assassination attempts on Meghna were relentless yet covert. Fortunately, she not only survived but also managed to turn the tables and catch some of the perpetrators.

In the process, she uncovered a few suspicious issues lurking within the Southern Army.

"The ones who tried to assassinate Meghna infiltrated the deepest parts of the Southern Army effortlessly, knowing too much internal information.

Their forged identities were made to appear as if they belonged to the Southern Army, and even though these identities had been created years ago, no one had noticed. Meghna found out that there were more than one or two such fake identities in the army, and reported to me that these individuals with fake identities had been moving around the South."

Fake soldiers in the Southern Army. Counterfeit identities. Years of suspicious activities.

Yet, despite all this, the General had been unaware. That meant…

“Someone I trusted… or perhaps multiple people, had betrayed me. Realizing that sent chills down my spine.”

“Do you wish for the Cavalry’s assistance to weed out the traitors within your ranks, General?”

“Yes. I’m embarrassed it took me this long to realize, but this isn’t something I can handle with just the special forces. Could you please convey my message to the Commander and ask for help so this old man can atone for failing to properly control the Southern Army?”

Yuder, with a cold yet clear intent, smiled.

“I’m sorry, but… that would be difficult.”

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Chapter 897

“I’m sorry, but… that would be difficult.”

General Gino blinked twice upon hearing Yuder’s response. The veteran general, unaccustomed to such unexpected words, visibly struggled to maintain his composure.

Before shocking the old general further, Yuder quickly continued, “Because, General, what you seek has already been prepared.”

“What do you mean by that? So, you mean to say…”

“Considering you came here alone, General, I believe you have some inkling of the spy’s identity. You probably just wanted to confirm your suspicions with the aid of an external force, like the Calvary.”

General Gino momentarily fell silent, an implicit acknowledgment of Yuder’s correctness.

“Then, there’s no need for us to take any action. Whoever you suspect, General, is likely the person you think.”

General Gino’s eyes flickered. After a moment, he groaned softly and rubbed his forehead.

“I can’t hide it, can I? Yes, you’re right. I came here suspecting one of my disciples, whom I’ve trusted and assigned tasks to, as the spy. Hoping I was wrong, perhaps you even suspect his name. The one in charge of the Special Brigades…”

“Special Officer Galexentre Balfors. We met briefly on the day of the hailstorm. I remember him.”

The old general was silent for a while, a whirl of complex emotions passing through his eyes. Though swiftly concealed, Yuder, with his past

experience, could guess at the general’s feelings.

It must be somewhat relieving to see the situation resolving faster than expected. However, the thought of how much the Calvary knew and their suspicions would naturally bring forth questions and wariness. The fact that they were outdone by an external organization like the Calvary in internal intelligence would bruise his pride, and concerns about his command were inevitable.

Above all, the chilling realization that the Calvary had been monitoring the spy situation before the general and had yet to inform him suggested a cold, hard truth.

‘General Gino must have surmised that Emperor and Commander Kishiar might be observing him too, suspecting his possible connections with the spies.’

“Because of my failure to properly command the Southern Army, His Majesty and the Calvary Commander must have been greatly concerned. It shames me to have added to their worries amidst these troubling times.”

Indeed, General Gino’s words mirrored Yuder’s thoughts exactly, albeit without the expected cold undertone.

Yuder, looking at him, suddenly asked, “Aren’t you disappointed?”

“Disappointed? With whom? Ha, I might be old, but not so decayed yet. Don’t make me more ashamed than I already am.”

On the contrary, he should be grateful for finally learning the truth. General Gino’s face looked somewhat defeated, but his sincerity was apparent.

It’s rare to find someone of his stature and age openly admitting their faults, especially a swordmaster revered throughout the empire. Yuder now understood why many Calvary members had grown to respect General Gino since the day of the hailstorm.

“Galexentre… I knew he was ambitious beyond his capabilities and lacked the diligence to handle it. I had hoped he would become more modest and aware of his limits with age.”

“…”

“Rather than as a mentor, I tried to judge as a superior… but it seems I failed. It’s quite embarrassing before the youth.”

“May I share my personal thoughts?”

Upon Yuder’s quiet inquiry, General Gino nodded with an unaffected smile.

“Of course, go ahead. What else do you have to enlighten me with?”

“It’s not information, but merely my thoughts.”

Yuder, staring straight at the old general, began, “Have you ever dug up sweet potatoes, General?”

“…Sweet potatoes? The ones we eat?”

Caught off guard by such an unexpected question, General Gino’s face briefly showed his surprise. But seeing Yuder not smiling, he soon answered seriously.

“I have, in my youth. I wandered around, helping at farms for food when I was hungry. That’s when I learned how hard it was to harvest the crops that we eat so easily.”

“That makes this easier to explain.”

Yuder, with an expressionless face, continued, “Discovering that a disciple is the root of a spy must be heartbreaking, but I view Special Officer Galexentre Balfors as part of a tumor under this empire, much like the roots of a sweet potato. Pulling out one will likely lead to others following suit, akin to sweet potatoes.”

General Gino’s expression became complex.

“We don’t fully know yet how many such people exist undiscovered. Therefore, it’s quite fortunate that we’re starting with a part of the root in the Southern Army. The Commander and His Majesty must have made this choice with the same judgment.”

General Gino slightly parted his lips as if to speak, then closed them again.

“Lastly, I must say… I was about to contact you under the Commander’s orders about Galexentre Balfors. But since you came first, the order of events seems less important.”

“…So, the important thing is to root out all the sweet potatoes?”

“Yes. I hesitate to say this myself, but being from the countryside, I’m quite good at such tasks. And with your experience, General, I don’t think we have much to worry about.”

After Yuder finished with an unemotional expression, there was a brief silence.

Then,

“Pff, hahaha!”

The Sword of the Empire, Gino Bordelli, laughed heartily for the first time in ages, not caring about his dignity.

“Hahaha! Where did such an outstanding talent come from? From the countryside, you say? I regret not visiting those hills!”

General Gino’s laughter was carefree, not resembling the solemn, experienced figure he usually was. Like in his youth, when he abandoned responsibilities and roamed wildly with his sword, his face now bore a refreshingly cheerful smile.

Yuder thought that smile somewhat resembled Kishiar’s laughter. Not in the sense of shared blood, but rather the candid attitude and unguarded laughter in unexpected moments were strikingly similar.

That honest demeanor when acknowledging and being impressed by someone, instantly breaking down all barriers.

Was it because Kishiar learned the sword from General Gino? Whether the saying ‘the master and disciple resemble each other’ applies here was uncertain, but at least in this aspect, the overlapping traits between the two were unmistakably evident.

Perhaps that was why both of these men were so revered by their subordinates.

It was just a thought, but Yuder found himself feeling a bit closer to General Gino, whom he had always observed with a sense of detachment and objectivity. Although he had always known that Gino was Kishiar’s mentor, it felt as if he truly recognized this fact only now.

“Yes, it’s been decades since I last dug up sweet potatoes, and I’m not very confident, but for His Majesty and this empire, I would wield an old sword and uproot the roots if necessary. It’s embarrassing to realize that there were rotten sweet potatoes in a garden I thought was well-tended, but if this old man can be of any help, I am more than willing.”

“I appreciate your willingness to help,” Yuder responded.

“We’ll discuss the details later. I should also speak to the Commander of the Cavalry and His Majesty.”

General Gino extended his hand first, offering a handshake. It was a gesture that would have made the young swordsmen who admired him swoon on the spot.

“Is this alright?” Yuder asked as he slowly took the general’s hand and returned the greeting.

“In truth, I had my doubts about you, even after hearing of your reputation. But now, I’m ashamed of having thought that way. Ever since I arrived here, my blind prejudices have been stripped away day by day, and today feels like the most enlightening of them all.”

General Gino said this with a voice full of various emotions, then suddenly flashed a secretive smile.

“Now I understand why the Commander so values you and wanted to ‘dance’ with you. Come to think of it, he’s always had a fondness for people like you, ever since he was young.”

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Chapter 898

“Come to think of it, he’s always had a fondness for people like you, ever since he was young.”

“…Yes?”

Suddenly, the conversation turned to Kishiar’s childhood, catching Yuder off guard and filling him with confusion. Regardless of whether Yuder knew how to react or not, the general just smiled pleasantly.

“Honest, consistent, and yet courageously unpredictable children. If they had a sense of humor, he would definitely want them by his side without a second thought. One such person, brought over by his stubbornness, is now the adjutant.”

“Ah….”

The mention of Nathan Zuckerman made it a bit more understandable.

‘But, a sense of humor?’

Nathan Zuckerman and humor. It was hard to reconcile, but it was true that he was honest, consistent, and fearless enough to face Nahan alone. The unexpected aspects he occasionally showed in this life proved he wasn’t as rigid as one might think.

Whether Yuder Aile was such a person was debatable.

Although Yuder found it hard to agree, he recalled Kishiar once saying something about Nathan Zuckerman and Yuder being quite similar. Maybe it was because they were master and disciple that they saw people similarly. Not sure of the reason, Yuder decided to take it as a compliment and accepted it casually.

“…Um, yes. Thank you.”

“Do you think I’m just flattering?”

“Not at all.”

“It makes sense now why His Highness always boasted about his assistant.”

“…”

Yuder gave up on responding and fell silent.

“Speaking of which, you also wield a sword, right?”

“Yes.”

Yuder glanced towards the sword he had leaned at a distance, so as not to intimidate the visiting guests. His sword, which had remained intact since the hailstorm, had since been cleaned and checked and was now quietly resting in its sheath.

General Gino’s eyes sparkled with interest at the sight.

“I’m really curious about your skill level. Might I see it sometime?”

“My swordsmanship is not worthy of your attention, General.”

“You needn’t be so modest. I’ve heard your main specialty is a sword technique combined with the powers of an Awakener. I’ve never seen anything like it. I saw others fighting in a similar manner on the day of the hailstorm, but everyone said your skills were the most exceptional.”

Many of Yuder’s colleagues who had imitated his combat style were now a significant part of the Cavalry. From General Gino’s perspective, who used traditional swordsmanship, it must have been quite intriguing to see such a style for the first time.

“Meghna was very curious about it too. Perhaps a sparring session with her would be good?”

Eventually, Yuder agreed that it would be an honor to spar with someone like Meghna Kurlieva. General Gino, satisfied with the answer, stood up from his seat with a content expression.

As Yuder bid farewell, General Gino approached the door. He hesitated for a moment before asking quietly.

“About the sweet potato you mentioned earlier. Once you dig up one, the rest becomes easier, right?”

“That’s true. It’s only difficult to dig the ground until you find one. Once you’ve found it, you just have to search around it, which is much easier.”

Sweet potatoes are connected by their roots, with several tubers attached. Once one is found, pulling the vine makes it easy to find the rest. Occasionally, the roots break or are buried too deep to be found immediately, but ultimately, they are all connected at the base. Searching the surrounding area usually made it easy to find them.

“Yes. I will never forget the advice you shared today. No matter how old one gets, there’s no end to learning,” said the General, his laughter both refreshing and slightly bitter.

“The Southern Army is always ready to cooperate with the Cavalry, so if you need anything, just let Captain Sunz know, as you have before.”

There was not a hint of hesitation in his departing figure.

Yuder watched the departing figure a little longer than usual before turning away.

Time flies swiftly.

On the day when the fifth or more rift was witnessed in Mclara, and similar phenomena were observed in the nearby Boucheleg, Yuder finally received the Red Stone’s medium, secretly sent from the capital.

Covered in multiple layers and hidden among other items, the box looked nothing more than a supply cart for the Cavalry. The one who brought it

was none other than the Deputy Commander of the Sul Division, Steiber.

“Yuder! It’s good to see you looking healthy after such a long time.”

“You too seem healthy, Steiber.”

“Well, I haven’t been through as much as you, having stayed comfortably in the capital.”

Steiber, with his amiable face, greeted him without a hint of fatigue. Yuder nodded in response, casually checking the items inside the wagon, and picked up the box stored in the farthest corner.

“Did you encounter any problems during the transport?”

“It was a bit difficult to bring it among ourselves, but otherwise, it was fine. No one seemed to target it, perhaps because of the Cavalry’s emblem boldly displayed.”

“That’s a relief.”

“But… seeing that they even included me and other water-element guys from the Sul Division, the Commander must think the situation here is quite serious, right?”

Steiber asked, maintaining his smile while lowering his voice. Yuder nodded nonchalantly.

“Yes.”

Summoning Steiber, who had been guarding the capital like a final bastion, was not only to transport the Red Stone’s medium but also to prepare for an unforeseen disaster.

Steiber Rendley’s ability was water. The amount of water he could manipulate was leagues apart from Alik, who, despite intense training, could barely summon and control a cupful. As far as Yuder remembered, in a previous life, Steiber had the power to divert an entire small river before retirement. Now, having trained even more, it was highly likely that his

control had improved. Aside from Yuder, he was the most adept at handling large quantities of water with precision, making his position as the Deputy Commander of the Sul Division fitting.

‘It would make no sense not to call such a person for this mission.’

Steiber had a habit of heading home as soon as he drank, and was also the only one in a group of mostly young people with a wife and children. Everyone had been considerate to let him care for his family, but this time, his powers were desperately needed.

“Great. So it’s finally time for this old guy to shine… Seems like I’ll have to start warming up right away.”

Steiber had always felt a sense of guilt, knowing that while others were struggling and making their mark in different regions, he alone had seemingly done nothing. He understood that guarding was an essential task that someone had to do, but still, it felt uneasy in his heart to stay safe while his younger colleagues were getting hurt.

Therefore, even though he was yet to know what tasks awaited him in the South, his enthusiasm was sky-high.

“Do not overexert yourself until the Commander calls for you.”

“Don’t worry. Isn’t that what I’m best at?”

“Additionally, while you’re in the South, alcohol is prohibited.”

“Oh, naturally. I’m aware of my limits.”

With a nod and a stretch, Steiber expressed his agreement.

“Well then, I should go greet the others. I’m curious to see how much everyone has changed. Oh, right. Are the folks from the other regions arriving soon?”

“Yes. The Northern contingent is already here, and if we’re lucky, the East and West will arrive today or tomorrow.”

“That’s great. It’ll be nice to have everyone together after so long.”

After Steiber’s departure, Yuder returned inside with the box containing the Red Stone’s medium. He carefully opened the door to the Commander’s bedroom, which was, as expected, silent. Kishiar’s faint breathing could be heard, asleep since dawn.

Yuder approached his side and set the box down. Removing his gloves, he took Kishiar’s hand that was peeking out from the blanket. The steady pulse in his hand was palpable.

“Commander.”

Even when called by name, Kishiar did not wake up immediately. The sight of him, not waking up easily due to being a heavy sleeper, was initially unfamiliar to Yuder, but now he had grown quite accustomed to it.

Yuder gripped the hand a bit tighter and raised his voice.

“Commander, it’s time to wake up.”

As he spoke, he released the scent, and Yuder’s scent slowly filled the previously odorless space. Shortly after, Kishiar’s eyes quietly opened.

The one red eye, still unique, revealed itself from beneath the eyelids, looking straight at Yuder. A smile filled his softly curved eyes.

“…There’s a fresh scent in the air.”

“Steiber arrived today, that’s probably why.”

“Already?”

“Here, what we’ve been waiting for has also arrived.”

Kishiar’s gaze shifted to the box that Yuder was indicating. He didn’t need to be told what was inside; he already knew.

“Finally, I can sleep a bit less.”

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Chapter 899

“Finally, I can sleep a bit less.”

Kishiar, with sleep still lingering in his eye, stretched and rose from his bed. The first thing he did upon getting up was not to eat or change clothes, but to lightly press his lips against Yuder’s cheek.

“Thank you for today as well.”

It was an embarrassing act, but with no one watching, it seemed harmless. Yuder stepped out of the bed and followed the walking man, recounting the day’s events.

“The fifth crack was spotted in Makla, and the first in Boucheleg.”

“It’s happening fast, considering the fourth just occurred not long ago.”

“The time the cracks were visible was significantly shorter. Had people not been searching so diligently, it would have been missed, disappearing as briefly as it appeared.”

The prompt deployment of the Cavalry members to areas where cracks were frequently spotted had greatly impressed the southern regions. The trust Cavalry had built up in Charloin played a big role in this. People were eager to help, not for a reward, but realizing that aiding in gathering information about these strange cracks would ensure their safety as well.

“How are the breakwaters being built in the coastal areas progressing?”

“Charloin’s are almost done. The work in other areas will soon be complete with the addition of more labor.”

Constructing structures to withstand high waves was a massive undertaking. However, with the added strength of the Awakeners and the voluntary help of those idle in winter, everything was being completed remarkably quickly.

“If Steiber has arrived, you can start the joint training you planned.”

“Yes. I intend to start it tomorrow.”

“Then all that’s left is to wait for the arrival of those yet to come… and to meet Aton again.”

A cold smile formed on Kishiar’s lips. Yuder shook his head.

“No. The most important task remaining is your recovery, Commander. Do not overlook that.”

“Right. There’s that too.”

After a simple meal and changing clothes, Kishiar lay back down on the bed. Yuder sat beside him, holding a box containing the Red Stone’s medium.

What Yuder was about to do was something he had attempted before.

Now able to handle pure power due to his proximity to the medium of the Red Stone, he planned to use his fully harnessed ability to transfer the power from the medium into another’s body.

It wasn’t an easy task, but previous success gave him some confidence.

‘I believe this method will be effective, but I mustn’t be complacent.’

As Yuder took a deep breath to calm his mind, Kishiar chuckled softly.

“My assistant seems like someone who doesn’t know how to be nervous, but that’s not the case, it seems.”

“What are you saying, Commander? I am human, after all. It’s natural to be nervous facing an important task.”

Especially since the person he was about to perform this task on was none other than Kishiar himself. It would be more fitting if Kishiar were the one more nervous, but he appeared relaxed and in good spirits.

Seeing Yuder’s expression, Kishiar half-closed his eye and whispered soothingly.

“It’s alright. Whatever you’re going to do, I’m fine with it. I’m prepared to accept whatever happens. Ah, but don’t overexert yourself to the point of harm.”

His words, so characteristic of him, instantly eased the tension that had been building inside Yuder.

Upon hearing Kishiar’s readiness to accept whatever may happen, Yuder wanted to caution him against such reckless declarations. For a moment, Yuder’s usual impassiveness faded, and his eyes narrowed in concern, disappearing beneath his eyelids.

Then, with renewed determination, they opened again.

“…I’ll begin now.”

Yuder opened the box. Upon removing the black cloth that covered its contents, the familiar dark red stones were revealed, along with an unexpected folded note.

‘What’s this…?’

“What’s wrong?”

“It seems… His Majesty didn’t just send the medium.”

There was no seal or signature on the note to indicate the sender, but Yuder knew there could only be one person who would have included it - Emperor Keilusa.

Carefully picking up the note, Yuder handed it to Kishiar. As Kishiar unfolded it and read its contents, he let out a laugh of disbelief.

“Haha, His Majesty indeed.”

“Is it important news?”

“No. It’s just a scolding. Would you like to read it?”

Yuder hesitated to read a private note sent by the Emperor to his brother, but Kishiar had already turned it towards him, leaving him no choice but to read the plainly written message.

The young hero of the empire suffers too much because of you. As the Emperor, as your brother, I can’t help but feel ashamed and sorry. Don’t embarrass me further, and from now on, just report back via letter. I hope this item will be of help to you and the Baron.

The note was indeed a scolding, just as he had said. Yet, despite its stern tone, the final sentence clearly conveyed the Emperor’s wish for Kishiar’s recovery.

Is this what brotherhood is like?

Yuder, who had no siblings, couldn’t fully understand, but he felt somewhat relieved knowing the Emperor trusted him. Despite the Emperor’s exalted status, there was an oddly close and intimate feeling, leaving Yuder with a peculiar sense of ease. He wondered if it was appropriate to feel this way about His Majesty, the Emperor of the Empire.

While Yuder pondered, Kishiar, having chuckled silently for a while, set the letter aside.

“Let’s get back to it then. We must respond to His Majesty’s expectations.”

“Yes.”

With a now relaxed heart, Yuder looked again into the box. The stones, resembling raw gems, were the mediums containing the power of the Red Stone created by Thais Yulman. The same stones that had saved Emperor Keilusa, Yuder hoped, would now aid Kishiar.

“…”

The air shifted with a whoosh. One of Yuder’s eyes gleamed golden, and power began to flow from his fingertips. Like the previous trial, but faster,

colorful energies rose above Kishiar's body.

These energies, marking territories and lines like a beautiful map on his body, seemed like living entities within Kishiar, breathing and moving, constantly changing. Yuder's differently colored eyes meticulously scanned them.

'The rest has certainly helped; his energies have balanced out more evenly. But… because of that, the Awakener's powers are not aligning properly.'

Much of Kishiar's Awakener's power was used to wrap around and protect his vessel. This meant that a slightly greater absolute amount of this power was necessary compared to the others.

Kishiar, up until now, had been finely balancing the quantities of his various powers, depleting them evenly. However, currently, it was difficult for him to manually adjust them as before, especially since all his powers had similarly recovered. There wasn't enough power to envelop his vessel. With the protective power around his vessel being less than usual, the vessel itself seemed perilously unstable, and the other powers within it appeared on the verge of entangling disastrously.

'So… it's as if there's a lack of an entity to balance all these powers.'

In human society, this could be likened to a sudden and unreasonable reduction in soldiers and knights responsible for protecting a city and overseeing its law and order. If there's a breach in security, even places that usually seem stable can quickly encounter problems. And what about areas that were already troubled? Chaos was inevitable.

"Are you feeling any pain?"

"Hmm……. Not at all."

"You've recovered much of your strength compared to before. However, from my perspective, it still seems like the balance of the Awakener's power is off, delaying the recovery of your vessel."

“Then we’ll need to supplement that part, just as you said.”

Kishiar responded gently.

“Yes. Please inform me immediately if you feel anything unusual.”

Yuder clasped a medium in his hand. As a tingling sensation pricked his fingertips, a concentrated power within him began to overflow, elevating to an extreme level.

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Chapter 900

Yuder clasped a medium in his hand. As a tingling sensation pricked his fingertips, a concentrated power within him began to overflow, elevating to an extreme level.

“Please hold this, Commander. I trust you already know what must be done.”

“I understand.”

Though Yuder alone could absorb the power of the medium, when another Awakener held it, their power amplified significantly. This had already been proven during Emperor Keilusa’s time when Kishiar had benefited from it.

Like before, both Yuder and Kishiar needed to combine their powers, necessitating a medium for Kishiar as well.

Yuder placed his left hand over Kishiar’s, who was firmly gripping the medium, and with his right hand, he picked up a new medium. Kishiar whispered in a low voice, “Connect.”

Whoosh…

The air around Kishiar shifted dramatically, signaling the reactivation of their connection after a long hiatus.

A tingling sensation surged inside Yuder’s eyes, and indescribable feelings flooded through their touching skin. Without resisting, Yuder allowed these sensations to seize something within him and pull it forcefully. He shivered slightly, feeling everything inside him intertwine smoothly with the intruder.

It felt akin to the times when Kishiar would embrace him.

How strange and mystical it was to recognize the owner of the power through sensation alone, even without a physical form? It was as if Kishiar, or rather, the very essence of his being, was etched invisibly within him…

“Hmm…”

Yuder swallowed the dizzying sensation, closing and then reopening his eyes. The completed connection unfolded before his gaze.

Between him and the reclining Kishiar, golden threads fluttered like fish swimming through water. This was their beautiful, unseen ‘connection’-visible only to them.

This was not surprising. He had seen a similar scene during Emperor Keilusa’s time.

However, what was troubling was the sheer number of threads this time; what seemed like just a few strands before now appeared to be dozens.

‘…What is this?’

Despite his typically impaired sense of beauty, even Yuder was momentarily captivated by this fantastical sight.

“Can you see it?” Yuder muttered, gazing at the countless threads, to which Kishiar replied, “It has increased. Something has…”

“If even you, Commander, can see it, then it’s not an illusion.”

Yuder longed to examine it further, but realizing it wasn’t urgent, he took a deep breath and lowered his head.

What remained was the absorption and release of the power within the medium.

Recalling past experiences, Yuder tightly gripped the medium, wishing to absorb the power within. Soon, his bare palms, free from any gloves, began to tingle. The dormant power inside the dark red medium responded with a flash of light.

A sensation akin to intense heat absorbed through the skin began to rise. Drawing in the pure power from the medium was an indescribable feeling. If Yuder's innate power was like a light mist, then the pure power from the medium was heavy like flowing water. Though both were essentially water, the density they possessed was fundamentally different.

It felt as if Yuder's entire body was being crushed under heavy pressure, sometimes expanding uncontrollably, leaving him gasping for breath.

The power spreading from his absorbed palm deep into his body was hot and cold, repeatedly shifting between stinging and chilling sensations.

'But… it's certainly more bearable than before.'

When he had first attempted this for Emperor Keilusa, not only was his physical condition poor, but handling the power of the medium was also challenging. Compared to his initial attempts, where he couldn't even dare to control the power that seeped into his body, feeling as if he was being consumed by flames, his current state was significantly improved.

Now, the shock of absorbing the power was not just less; he could even discern the detailed nature of the sensations.

Moreover, even after fully absorbing the power contained in a single medium, he felt he could handle a bit more.

Yuder hesitated for a moment, pondering whether it was better to absorb the power one by one as he went along, or to absorb as much as he could at once and then proceed. He dropped one spent medium and picked up a new one.

Whoosh…

The power of the second medium began to be absorbed. After integrating it into his body, Yuder discarded it and picked up a third. When the absorption of the third was halfway done, his hand, trembling beyond his control, caught his eye.

‘Reaching my limit…’

Looking down, his hand was mottled with dark red veins. He couldn’t tell how far they had spread, but instinctively, he felt he shouldn’t go any further. The sensation of his skin prickling and burning made his nerves acutely sensitive.

‘This is as far as I go…’

Observing him, Kishiar asked in a low, subdued voice, “Can you handle any more? Are you alright?”

“…Yes. I’ll stop after this one.”

Yuder exhaled deeply, finishing the absorption of the third medium. He clenched and then unclenched his trembling hand, discarding the empty shell.

The black stone hit the carpet beneath the bed with a thud, rolling across the floor.

Yuder then placed his hand over Kishiar’s abdomen. He took a deep breath, and his intensely focused eyes quickly scanned the four powers, the central vessel, and the red power enveloping it.

So far, there was no change from the initial situation.

‘I’ll begin the infusion.’

Conveying his intent through a shared glance, Kishiar nodded slightly in understanding.

Yuder looked down, starting to release the absorbed power. The pain he remembered returned, and his eyes, which had turned gold, now shone as if glowing.

His skin felt hot. His hands, his entire body, and his belly churned.

The water-like power, following Yuder’s will, slowly began to move outward, targeting a specific point. It was certainly faster than before. Just as it condensed at his fingertips, Kishiar’s power, emerging from somewhere, perfectly timed, snatched it up like a net.

“Huh…”

Inside and out, above and below.

The two, sharing a single will, overlapped and transferred the energy as if they were one being. Even with prior experience, it was far from easy. The power he had absorbed to the point of burden gave him an unfamiliar, uncomfortable sensation, and sweat formed all over his body as heat rose.

Despite the sweat streaming down his face, Yuder was frighteningly focused. It was only when the energy released from his hand slowly seeped into Kishiar’s body that Yuder finally let out a breath he didn’t realize he had been holding.

‘It’s done.’

Kishiar, furrowing his brow, exerted more force on the hand holding the medium. The fact that even Kishiar, who barely showed signs of distress, was visibly affected suggested the perilous nature of their current endeavor.

‘Indeed… it was wise to absorb all at once before starting.’

Now, Yuder’s only task was to swiftly push the remaining energy in. Even as the power seemed ready to explode out of his control at any moment, he exerted more force on his hand. The energy, flowing like water from top to bottom, continuously infused into Kishiar, was clearly visible to Yuder’s eyes.

And Kishiar, through their connection, must have been seeing what Yuder saw.

Kishiar, too, without a moment to wipe the sweat on his forehead, regulated his breathing while aiding the process. His hand clutching the medium

turned white with the exertion of force, but his expression showed no significant change. His endurance was, once again, astonishing.

The only way to alleviate the pain Kishiar was enduring was to swiftly complete this task.

In a trance where time and space seemed to dissolve, Yuder poured all his capabilities into this task.

Transferring all the energy absorbed from the three mediums took considerable time, even in haste. But as most of it was successfully infused, the red power flowing into Kishiar began to visibly accumulate.

Yuder finished infusing the power and placed his fingertips above the gathered energy. The power of the Red Stone responded to his will, slowly being drawn towards his fingertips.

Moving energy within another's body was strenuous for Yuder, and it seemed to inflict even greater pain on Kishiar.

"…Hmm."

A faint groan, mixed with breath, slipped through Kishiar's tightly closed lips. When Yuder swiftly looked up, he saw the veins straining on Kishiar's neck and jaw.

"…"

The golden threads that surrounded them flickered painfully to the eye, trembling as if reacting to Yuder's emotions. Kishiar's hand holding the medium lightly tapped Yuder's, signaling him to continue.

It's okay, keep going.

The unspoken gesture seeped through their 'connection' into Yuder. Along with it, Yuder felt Kishiar's concern, immense patience, and a purpose greater than the pain, as well as deep affection.

Yuder briefly closed and then opened his eyes. The sensation of sweat trickling down and wetting his eyelashes, then dropping off, cleared his vision.

‘Understood.’

Yuder nodded faintly and then looked down again.

The red energy, following his guidance, finally reached Kishiar’s vessel.

The original power, barely enough to wrap around the vessel, quickly intertwined with the new energy.

For a moment, an overwhelming force surged into Kishiar’s hand holding the medium. The stone, made of sturdy material, seemingly impervious to breaking, appeared to crack audibly under the intense pressure.

Yuder, too, watched tensely, unblinking.

And then-……

“…Haa.”

After a moment, Kishiar’s energy and the newly infused power of the Red Stone completely merged and harmonized.

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Chapter 901

As the fused power completely enveloped Kishiar's vessel, the other minor powers, which had been anxiously huddled, began to flow more smoothly. The force, focusing solely on the vessel, lent its energy, making it seem effortless to maintain the balance.

Yuder finally retracted his power only after fully confirming that Kishiar's body, power, and vessel were all unharmed.

An exhaustion, hitherto unfelt, suddenly surged over him, threatening to topple his body at any moment. Yet, he concealed it, considering the even more exhausted Kishiar.

"…Is it over now?"

"Yes. You've endured well. How do you feel?"

"Of course, I'm fine. I feel much more comfortable than before."

Nodding, Kishiar released a weak laugh along with a sigh, letting go of the medium he had been clutching. Instead, he grasped and pulled Yuder's hand, which had been touching him all along.

Over the pale hand, still marred with dark red veins, the man pressed his warm lips firmly. Closing his eyes and holding the kiss for a long time, he inhaled deeply, as if savoring a fragrance, before opening his eyes again.

Yuder couldn't tear his gaze away from the vivid red light flickering within.

"Once again, you've saved me."

"…"

"Words of thanks alone can't fully express my gratitude. But still… thank you. For releasing me early from this endless slumber and the prison called

a bed.”

Prison.

In that brief word, Yuder felt he caught a glimpse of the man’s true feelings, which he had quietly endured, seemingly accepting without issue.

Indeed. How could it not feel that way? Even if a person chooses a place for their own stability, spending most of their time alone in bed, sleeping without meeting anyone, could never be enjoyable.

Even for a strong man with broad shoulders and a sturdy back, it was the same.

Yuder bit his lip briefly, then shook his head.

“There’s no need for that. It wasn’t just my doing; it was possible because of the Commander’s permission and help.”

“Right. I knew you’d say that. You’d probably say that success alone is enough, and no reward or gift is necessary, right?”

“Were you planning to offer something? That’s not necessary. You know it wasn’t done for such reasons.”

“But His Majesty might not think the same.”

“Please, stop His Majesty. If you really want to do something for me, that would be enough.”

“Oh, instigating a fight between close brothers like that.”

Kishiar’s lips curled into a smile, a cool beauty returning as usual, but with a deeper smile than normal. He then rested his cheek on Yuder’s hand.

“…We’re both tired. Shall we sleep a bit more here before getting up?”

Yuder, who would have refused any other offer or embarrassing words, couldn’t bring himself to reject this. He was indeed so tired that even

keeping his eyes open was difficult.

Yuder did not refuse the guiding hand and lay his head beside the man. Only then did the beautiful threads fluttering around them slowly start to disappear.

Seeing this, a thought he had earlier suddenly slipped out without passing through his mind.

“…Being connected, it seems, might be less about being tied together and more about being engraved into each other.”

“Why did you think that? Was it because of the sharing of emotions earlier?”

Kishiar, gazing at the blurred thread, softly questioned. Yuder shook his head.

“No. It’s just… Every time I felt the Commander’s presence without seeing it through this, I had similar thoughts.”

“Indeed… An engraving can be felt and recognized without sight. Its nature and to whom it belongs as well. Is that what you mean?”

“It does sound a bit like treating someone as an object… but it seems similar.”

Kishiar then wrapped Yuder in his arms and let out a low chuckle.

“I’ve felt the same. Engraving, that’s a good metaphor. I had thought of a slightly different word.”

“What word do you mean?”

“It’s more fitting for an object, as you said earlier. It’s…”

The man, pausing in his speech, leaned in close, forehead against forehead, and whispered softly to Yuder, who was looking up at him.

“Imprint.”

At the unexpected word, Yuder slowly closed and then opened his eyes.

“The first time I became aware of its existence, I felt as if your presence was carved into me with a blade, deeply imprinted.”

“…”

“It was like carving the owner’s name on a solid blade, over and over with deep, burning heat, so it could never be erased… That’s how it felt. The thread-like appearance is more like a thin trace left by such a carving.”

Though it looked thin and delicate like a thread, and beautiful, the sensation of being connected was not as gentle. The feeling of one’s existence dominating and deeply embedding inside, never to be removed, was closer to Kishiar’s metaphor of being carved with a blade.

“Maybe it’s a somewhat emotionless word.”

“No… On second thought, ‘imprint’ seems more fitting than just a simple connection.”

Imprint. Yuder murmured the word, recontemplating the nature of the connection that had now found its true name.

He felt as if several faint holes within him were being filled once again.

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“Commander!”

“Commander, you’ve finally arrived!”

The next day, Kishiar, after a long absence, appeared before his members. Seeing Yuder’s usual expressionless face following him, the members were moved. It was clear from Yuder Aile’s typical demeanor that the Commander’s condition was now truly nothing to worry about.

“Oh. Such a grand welcome. Did you miss me that much?”

“Of course. Isn’t it obvious?”

Hinn and Finn, adhering to the disciplinary actions they had set for themselves, had not left the training grounds except for assigned missions during this period. They even refrained from conversing with others, leading many members to genuinely worry about the Eldore siblings’ mental states.

Yuder, respecting the discipline the siblings had imposed on themselves, had not initiated any personal conversation with them since their reunion.

Instead, he delivered written hellish training menus to them, only checking to ensure they completed them to the end.

Physical exertion doesn’t suddenly make a person mature. However, such primal suffering undoubtedly helps in alleviating inner turmoil and realizing what is important.

The Eldore siblings had been overly confident in their abilities and enjoyed flaunting their natural talents. They were good kids but often didn’t heed others’ warnings or advice, still lacking understanding of what should be prioritized in crucial moments.

In their previous life, due to such personalities, the Eldore siblings had failed to forge close bonds with others in the Cavalry, often finding themselves isolated and only keeping to each other.

Kishiar believed that the difficult and strenuous tasks they had set for themselves and diligently carried out every day would undoubtedly aid them in adulthood.

With a healthy complexion and a smile, Kishiar greeted each member by name as they approached him, effortlessly showing his awareness of all their recent activities and engaging in conversations.

Among them was Steiber, who had just arrived from the capital the day before, and the Eldore siblings, Hinn and Finn, who, due to their punishment, couldn't approach as usual and looked dejected from a distance.

In fact, having spent time in silent training and deep thought, the siblings' expressions seemed much calmer than before as they finally conversed with Kishiar.

"Commander……. I'm glad to see you healthy again."

"It's a relief to see you've recovered."

Kishiar didn't add unnecessary words to alleviate their guilt. Instead, he skillfully conversed about the restoration missions and training they had been involved in.

"Yuder told me. You've been sleeping in the training ground every day? He had turned off the lanterns there several times when you forgot."

"Ah…"

"I'm not scolding you. Just don't overexert yourself to the point of sleeping without turning off the lights. Remember, what you truly need in a crucial moment is not in your hands but in your head. Can you promise me that?"

"…Yes. Understood!"

Reflecting on Kishiar's words, the siblings brightened up and ran back to the training ground. Steiber clicked his tongue as he watched them.

"Those kids used to fool around in the training ground. Seems like they've really been straightened out this time. I was so surprised when I went to greet them yesterday. It made me think a lot."

"You haven't changed a bit, Steiber, and that's good."

"Haha. That's the charm of being the oldest member of the Cavalry, isn't it?"

Sunz, the Captain of the Special Forces, and the successful candidates from the Southern Branch also hurried over upon hearing of Kishiar's arrival, greeting him cheerfully before departing.

And as if to add to the good news, that afternoon, the long-awaited arrivals finally reached them.

"I'm here! Jimmy Ocker, representative of the Eastern Branch!"

Jimmy, representing the Eastern Branch, energetically waved his hand in greeting, followed by Emun from the Western Branch, who also smiled broadly.

"It's good that our Western Branch isn't the last to arrive. Emun Philang and eight others have arrived."

After the representatives finished their greetings, the successful candidates, one by one, shyly offered their own. Yuder's gaze lingered particularly on Gloe, who had neatly tied up her long hair, making her look less gloomy, and Marin, who no longer appeared exhausted.

"…Hello. The successful candidate… Gloe……"

"It's nice to meet you again. I'm Marin. It seems like you somehow knew this would happen?"

He observed their faces, so different from their past lives, and slowly nodded.

It was time for him to greet them differently from his past life.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Yuder Aile, Assistant to the Cavalry Commander."

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Chapter 902

“Nice to meet you. I’m Yuder Aile, Assistant to the Cavalry Commander.”

It was a novel experience for Yuder Aile, serving not as the Commander, but as an assistant, to officially greet Gloe and Marin, who had just become members of the Cavalry. Of course, they wouldn’t remember the past events.

Even if Yuder was the only one who remembered, it did not mean that these memories were meaningless. To Yuder, they held significant value.

“I would like to first thank those who, despite having passed the selection recently, volunteered to come here. The others will kindly inform you shortly about what you’ll be doing here, so don’t worry.”

“Understood!”

Upon hearing Kishiar’s words of gratitude, the faces of the new recruits from the eastern and western branches showed a mix of emotions: gratification, surprise, and excitement. The recruits from the southern branch, already accustomed to the Commander’s demeanor, were not as startled.

‘It’s going to take some time to get used to all the unexpected things they’re about to see, different from what they’ve heard or imagined.’

After the greetings were over, the members began to leave one by one. Yuder called out to Gloe and Marin, who were about to follow their respective branch members.

“Gloe, Marin. Could you stay for a moment?”

“Yes?”

“I have something personal to discuss with you.”

Exchanging awkward glances, Gloe and Marin nodded. The other members whispered among themselves with interest.

“Oh… Are they the ones Yuder personally selected this time?”

“Exactly. It’s no joke. Have you heard about their abilities?”

“Of course. One can bestow blessings with cards, and the other can make any plant grow instantly, regardless of location or target.”

“Is that really true? Wow, that’s insane. I’d love to spar with them soon.”

“I was thinking the same…”

It was a positive sign that the members expressed a healthy competitive spirit rather than dark jealousy towards the newcomers with interesting abilities. While Gloe and Marin’s eyes wavered slightly at their words, Yuder paid no heed.

After all, they too would eventually become just like the others after a year or so in the Cavalry.

When everyone else had left, only Gloe, Marin, Yuder, and Kishiar, who was leaning against the corner of a desk with his arms crossed at a distance, remained in the now spacious room. As Gloe and Marin kept stealing glances at the desk, Kishiar waved his hand with a carefree smile.

“Ah, don’t mind me. The conversation you’re about to have is with my assistant. I’m just a vase in the room, so to speak.”

“A vase…”

Gloe muttered quietly.

Following Kishiar’s example, Yuder treated him like a mere decorative vase and spoke without concern.

“It’s been a while since we last met. I’m glad to see you both doing well. How have you found the Cavalry?”

“Honestly, until I got to the western branch, I wasn’t sure if I could really make it… but it turned out to be a better place than I expected. I still don’t quite understand what you saw in me to invite me to the Cavalry, but I wanted to come when you said you needed help.”

Marin’s candid response was followed by Gloe, who had been hesitating.

“I too… have found every day… enjoyable since I passed. The food is good too…. And… I heard that the blessing I gave you before… was helpful later on….”

“Ah. Yes, that’s right.”

Gloe’s blessing had enabled Yuder to remain unharmed during a sudden onset of heat. While he naturally refrained from mentioning anything related to the heat period when sending updates to his colleagues, he did share how the blessing had been a great help in dealing with a pursuing group of assassin mercenaries.

“If it weren’t for that blessing at that time, I would have been severely injured. I haven’t had the chance to express my gratitude directly until now.”

As Yuder bowed his head in thanks, Gloe was startled and waved her hands in protest.

“No, that’s not why I did it…”

“Accept it. Even this vase here thinks it was a worthwhile deed,” The giant vase chimed in the distance, making Gloe unsure of how to react and eventually nodding in acknowledgment to Yuder.

“So, why have you kept us here? We’re just new recruits… Is there something specific you need us to do?”

Marin asked, raising her hand. Yuder nodded and began to explain.

“Of course, there is. First, Marin. Among the plants you can currently grow, do you have the ability to grow trees?”

“Trees… It’s harder than growing brambles, but yes, I can do it.”

“And the largest and tallest tree you can grow?”

“A Guwar tree, I suppose…”

Guwar trees were not exclusive to the west; they grew in the south as well and were often used as natural fences due to their dense growth, despite being thin, reaching several meters in height.

“That should suffice. How big and how fast can you grow them within a certain area?”

“A certain area… It’s hard to say. I haven’t done it to that extent yet. During the Cavalry entrance exam, I could grow a tree continuously for the duration it took a palm-sized hourglass to empty completely. It died quickly because I grew it in a hurry, though.”

Marin’s trees, which she had grown using her abilities, lasted just over a week before wilting. The plants she produced, though appearing similar to ordinary ones, had a completely different growth period and life span.

Usually, they grew and wilted much faster than normal plants, but the red thornbush that covered an entire field and led to barren land after her previous life’s rampage had lasted much longer.

‘Anyway… that should be enough.’

Yuder recalled facing Marin in a previous life. She had rapidly grown towering trees and dense poisonous thornbushes, creating natural barricades to block knights and the Cavalry, thereby protecting her allies with her tremendous power.

If she could use that power here, even to a lesser extent, it would surely be of help in the forthcoming disasters.

“That’s enough. From now on, I would like you to use that power in designated places across the south. Is that possible?”

“…Trees in the south? How many am I supposed to grow?”

“As many as your power allows.”

“That much? May I ask why trees are needed in the south in the first place?”

Despite applying to support the southern region, they were unaware of the Cavalry’s preparations. Typically, support roles were imagined to involve supply or menial tasks.

However, what Yuder expected from them was far from such tasks.

“The Cavalry is currently preparing for the likelihood of various natural disasters striking across the southern region.”

“Natural disasters…” Marin echoed, a hint of apprehension in her voice.

“A tree with deep roots and a tall stature can serve as the best wall even in the midst of storms and winds. Sometimes, they can also prevent landslides by holding onto loose soil.”

Indeed, this was why her power was needed in the south, where the land was predominantly sandy with few large trees and the terrain was lower than the water level. After hearing Yuder’s explanation, Marin pondered for a moment before nodding firmly.

“I understand. I’ll give it a try. It seems like something only I can do.”

“I, along with the other members, will provide you with the utmost support and assistance. We’ll discuss the details as we progress with the work.”

Yuder concluded the conversation, allowing Marin to leave first.

Now, only Gloe remained. Sensing Yuder’s gaze, Gloe looked troubled.

“I… I can’t grow trees or anything like that. Should I just provide daily blessings with my cards to the other members?”

“No. What I have in mind for you is entirely different.”

“What would that be?”

“Your cards bestow necessary blessings on those who receive a reading. But, in some sense, the opposite is also possible, isn’t it?”

Gloe’s expression changed momentarily at Yuder’s nonchalant revelation.

“How did you…? I didn’t mention that during the entrance exam…”

“No power is entirely positive in its effects. That’s just how it is.”

He replied, but in truth, he knew this from his experiences in a previous life.

A shadow fell across Gloe’s somber face at Yuder’s words.

“You’re right. Tarot readings are like that. Each card holds dual meanings. Take, for example, the Festival of the Trumpeting Jester I showed before… It can be a blessing that wards off imminent danger, but at times, it can also bring misfortune, making one more noticeable to enemies.”

After saying this, Gloe cautiously asked.

“So… what exactly do you need from me?”

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Chapter 903

“So… what exactly do you need from me?”

Gloe’s abilities belong to the Jung Division. While most members of the Jung Division lack significant combat power, there are cases where even seemingly frail powers can become more threatening than anyone else’s.

Kanna, the current Deputy Commander of the Jung Division, had once possessed negligible combat skills and a frail body. However, through persistent training, she had managed to find the best combination to utilize her abilities in combat.

Her method involved reading information instantaneously during battle to discern the enemy’s combat style and attack patterns, then dodging and exploiting their vulnerabilities. Although this required incredible speed to read information and counterattack, Kanna had honed this technique through relentless physical training until Yuder deemed it useful.

In reality, Kanna usually supported other members who excelled in combat, as this was more advantageous. Nevertheless, should a moment come where she needed to fight directly, this power would undoubtedly become a useful weapon.

Gloe, like Kanna, had also honed her powers in a similar yet distinct manner for combat use. Unlike Kanna, Gloe lacked sufficient strength to defend herself, and having her abilities known across the continent led her to encounter many who sought to kidnap or eliminate her.

Just by giving a card reading, she could bestow a blessing akin to foresight that protected her subject. It was no wonder that many a power-seeker coveted such a gift. Had Yuder not intervened, Gloe might have ended up in the Sun Palace, serving Emperor Katchian for life before even experiencing life as a Cavalry member.

Having faced countless life-threatening situations and grown through real combat, Gloe could then use her once-per-day ability multiple times and manipulate the blessings in her cards in various ways. Moreover, her power to conjure intangible cards saved her life in critical moments.

And there was another aspect to her power.

She could invert the meanings contained in the cards, bringing fortune to allies and misfortune to foes - a unique combat strategy.

This would become the famous specialty of Gloe, who would later acquire the surname Marshel, becoming Gloe Marshel.

‘It was because of this power that Gloe, despite her young age and weak physical capabilities, could maintain her position as the Deputy Commander of the Jung Division for so long…’

Now, Yuder needed that power.

“In my opinion, it might be possible for you to ‘decide’ how to apply the other meanings of the cards to a subject. I wish for you to exert that power on someone.”

“…Just apply the other meanings? I haven’t used my power in that way before, I’m not sure… I’ve never even thought about it… It might not be possible. I don’t think it will work…”

Gloe hesitated and shook her head.

Yuder, looking directly at the anxious and intimidated Gloe, shook his head in return.

“No, it will be possible.”

“Why are you so sure…? You’re not me, Commander’s assistant.”

“Of course, I’m not you, but that doesn’t mean I’m unaware of your abilities. I’m confident there is no one better at understanding the abilities of an Awakener than myself.”

This was a well-known fact among the Cavalry members. Gloe, having been accepted into their ranks, would have heard of Yuder's reputation from the other members and was likely aware of this aspect.

"Yes, I've heard that you have been of great help in developing the abilities of others. They say once you see an ability, you understand it better than the user themselves… I'm not sure if that's true, though…"

"There's no need to doubt, it's true indeed. This flower vase can vouch for that."

From a distance, the flower vase chimed in again. However, this time, Gloe did not react much to his words.

"But my, my power is unique. It's not like I can bestow any blessing I wish at will… It took a lot of practice to use it even once a day."

"Look at that."

"Pardon?"

"You managed to use a power that originally wasn't possible once a day through practice, right? With more practice, you could use it ten times a day. And what's ten? You could make it dozens of times. Perhaps you could even use the power without the cards."

"What are you talking about… That's impossible."

It will be possible. You just don't know it yet.

"You say you achieved using it once a day through practice, so why claim other things are impossible? You haven't even tried them yet."

"Do I need to try to know that?"

"Of course, you don't know. How could you? How can you be so sure? Shall we make a bet? In a year's time, whether you can use your ability more than ten times a day?"

Gloe opened her lips in response to Yuder's emotionless answer, then hesitated and closed them again.

'She must lack confidence. Just scared and therefore quick to say it can't be done.'

Gloe already knows that the meanings contained in her cards are not singular. Probably the same in her previous life. Yet, it took her years to apply them deliberately as an attack against enemies… due to her lack of self-confidence.

But Yuder, who had already seen how she could develop, held a clear certainty. That was the difference between him and Gloe.

"Gloe. You already know all the meanings your cards hold. Then, isn't it possible that the reason why the power is only manifesting in blessings is not because 'it was always like that,' but because you have 'chosen' it to be so?"

Yuder emphasized certain parts of his speech. Gloe blinked her shadowed eyes, looking at Yuder's face as if she couldn't understand.

"…But I… I don't remember choosing… My power, it was just like that from the beginning."

"There is nothing that is 'from the beginning.' Some choices are made unconsciously, following familiarity. Like deciding which hand to extend when picking something up."

If an Awakener lacks confidence in their power, the power does not serve its master. If you can't believe that you can grasp an object in front of you, trembling and reaching out aimlessly, can you really achieve your goal?

Stretching out your arm, opening your hand, and picking up and bringing back an object - even such a simple and natural task becomes difficult without confidence. It was the same with abilities.

Gloe, having listened to Yuder's explanation, remained silent for a while. Then, taking a shaky breath, she lowered her head.

"…If I can use that power, who is the person I should use it on?"

The corners of Yuder's lips faintly lifted.

"The person currently beneath our feet, underground. Unnecessarily stubborn, but appears to know quite a bit."

"Underground, that means… there's a prison, isn't there?"

"Correct."

"Use my power on someone imprisoned… What exactly are you planning to do? I don't quite understand… I'm not sure if my cards have such a negative power that could be used in that way, and even if they do, there's no guarantee it will work as desired…"

"It's simple. When you use your power to bestow blessings, the recipient gets the 'necessary' blessing, right? Likewise, when the opposite force is exerted… something akin to a curse."

"Could it be…?"

Gloe took a deep breath as she seemed to finally understand.

"Do you mean to create conditions from the outside that would allow a specific type of power to manifest?"

"Your understanding is commendable."

What if the environment was manipulated in advance for the recipient of Gloe's card to be in physical danger? If the card's power manifested as a blessing, it would protect the body, but if it turned the other way, it might result in wounds that wouldn't heal or even worsen.

Yuder remembered the various powers of Gloe's cards.

Among them, he was targeting just one.

‘Truth.’

The nature of blessings varied greatly. Uncovering certain truths could be a blessing to allies and a curse akin to a nightmare for enemies.

Gloe, in her current life, had likely never used that card. The individuals she had helped with her card readings were mostly those in physical danger.

However, in her past life as the Deputy Commander of the Jung Division, Gloe had achieved significant results in interrogations using the card of truth. While she was not as unparalleled as Kanna in gathering information, the power of truth called forth by her card was special in a different field from reading information.

The person Yuder now intended for Gloe to use her power on was none other than Aton, the leader among the southern merchants and a spy-cum-priest sent by them. Both Kishiar and Yuder had met this man before. Initially, Aton showed some emotional disturbance, but he had not revealed any meaningful information about the impending disaster.

‘An incredibly stubborn bastard. Damn him.’

Yuder recalled Aton’s face from when he had visited him alone before Kishiar’s recovery.

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Chapter 904

He was confined in a solitary cell, looking emaciated.

Despite being shackled with heavy knight's leg irons on both his hands and feet, and having three of Alik's Awakener suppression devices around his neck, the man's gaze remained undimmed. Upon seeing Yuder, he immediately spoke.

"Your face looks quite battered. It's surprising that a monster like you could come back from death. It's a shame I couldn't see it myself."

No one had informed him of the events outside, yet he spoke as if he knew something. This indicated that not even the shackles and restraints could completely block his senses.

'It can't be helped. Even I, before my death, was confined for a long time, but being in a half-dead state didn't mean I was completely ignorant of the outside world.'

If one was quick-witted and could think on their feet, deducing various events from minimal clues wasn't difficult. It was slightly easier to act as if one knew something significant, even without knowing the whole truth. Yuder had often used this tactic to extract information from his interrogators when he was a prisoner.

It was unclear how much Aton had guessed about the outside affairs. Though he was certainly skilled in speaking, Yuder, having already experienced similar situations as a former prisoner, had no intention of falling for it.

"You're not in any position to comment on someone else's appearance."

Yuder's cold retort caused Aton to twitch his eyebrows and faintly curl one corner of his lips.

“I may be in this place now, but I’ve never been told I have an unsightly appearance. Even Duke Tain greatly admired my face and trusted me immensely.”

“I haven’t thought anyone to be particularly handsome except for the Commander, so your pride in Duke Tain’s compliments doesn’t quite resonate with me, but I’ll respect it.”

A brief silence fell before Aton let out a disbelieving chuckle.

“…Indeed, you’re even more handsome than what Duke Pelleta, the Cavalry Commander, described. Though his tongue is like that of a devil. Why hasn’t he come here? Is he perhaps in a worse state than you?”

People who have been defeated always seem to demonize their opponents, as if they’ve agreed upon this somewhere. It seemed no different for someone from the southern countries.

Yuder looked impassively into Aton’s eyes, which seemed to expect him to get angry, and replied.

“There’s no need to elaborate that you couldn’t win a verbal fight against the Commander. Probably no one in the entire continent could best him in that regard.”

Yuder, looking as if he had struck a nerve, sat relaxed in front of Aton and drew in his chin.

“Let’s end this pointless talk. I’m getting tired of hearing you think. We’re hardly acquaintances to exchange pleasantries, so let’s get to the main point.”

Yuder placed his hand on the table dividing them. His fingers, wrapped in black gloves, rhythmically tapped on the table, producing a sound.

His hand, not particularly gigantic or muscular compared to an ordinary person, was somehow more intimidating and nerve-wracking.

Aton knew very well what Yuder could do with that hand. It was a hand that reminded him of his humiliating defeat.

“What do you lot want?”

His flat, subdued voice resonated ominously in the cramped room.

“The actions you and your cohorts have undertaken so far are numerous, even considering only what I have managed to discern. Coveting the Red Stone, attempting assassinations, recruiting spies throughout the empire, and even implanting agents like yourself in various social strata to stir up unrest. Now, you’ve escalated to destabilizing the balance of an entire region. It’s likely there’s even more I haven’t uncovered yet.”

“…”

“Such extensive operations couldn’t have been executed in a short period. Surely, you’ve been preparing for at least several years, if not decades. Isn’t that so?”

“…”

“At first, I suspected your aim was to provoke a war. However, the actions of your group in the south have been excessively beyond any logical reasoning. What could you possibly gain from such surreal machinations? Are you seeking the downfall of the empire?”

Aton’s lips, dry and cracked, curled into a smile as he softly traced a curve in the air.

“You sound similar to your Commander. Indeed… it’s both surprising and impressive. I regret not realizing sooner that the empire had such astute individuals.”

“…”

“However, I see no reason to answer that.”

As expected, Yuder wasn't taken aback by this response and continued his relentless interrogation, constantly changing his tactics and shaking Aton for information. Yet, Aton remained unyieldingly resolute.

Yuder prided himself on his tenacity, but Aton proved to be a formidably stubborn adversary. While wielding a sword, Aton had been overconfident, making him easier to exploit. But in this interrogation, he was like a different person, maintaining an unbreakable calm and showing almost no reaction, making it difficult for Yuder to rattle him. Among those Yuder had interrogated, few had been as tough as Aton.

Even the Cavalry members waiting outside grew weary and astounded at the length of the interrogation, yet Yuder concluded it with little significant information gained.

Disappointed, but not disheartened, Yuder mused, 'Had it been so easy to extract information from him, the Commander and Kanna would have already achieved meaningful results when they interrogated him earlier.'

Kishiar had already tasked Kanna with analyzing Aton's belongings and fragments of his clothing to gather information. However, the insights Kanna gleaned were no more than what they already knew or had speculated.

'Aton… he seems like someone trained to anticipate such situations. He never reveals his intentions or thoughts, making it nearly impossible to read him.'

While Kanna's ability often felt like mind-reading, it wasn't. She read existing 'facts' and based her conjectures on these to understand underlying motives.

Even the most dangerous and quiet individuals tend to loosen their mental shackles when alone or reveal subtle emotional cues through their body language during interrogation. These minute details, imperceptible to the five senses, could be vividly reconstructed in Kanna's mind. However, Aton was an exception, leaving Kanna with much less to work with than usual.

‘Perhaps they have someone with abilities similar to Kanna’s on their side.’

In his previous life, Yuder had never heard of such a thing, but then again, nothing was certain. After all, Kanna’s existence had also been unknown until recently.

Nonetheless, Yuder believed there was still a way to interrogate Aton. If he could just invoke Gloe’s ‘Card of Truth’, it might provide the lead they needed.

Observing Yuder’s confident expression, Gloe remained silent for a while, seemingly unable to comprehend. To her, Yuder must have seemed like an enigma. However, she quickly reached a decision. Opening her tightly sealed lips, she slowly expressed her agreement.

“I don’t understand how you plan to do this… but if you, as the Commander’s assistant, are so certain, then alright. I’ll give it a try…….”

“Good. Even if it fails, the blame is mine, not yours, Gloe. You needn’t worry.”

“When do we start? Is it right now?”

“You must be tired now. Rest first, and we’ll test your power this evening. The actual task will begin tomorrow night.”

“Is it just you and me going?”

“No. One more person will join us.”

Gloe’s gaze naturally drifted towards Kishiar, standing in the distance. The man, who seemed to embody a giant vase, smiled like a flower as he shook his head.

“Um, no. I’ll just be observing from outside.”

Gloe appeared curious about who else would be joining them but chose not to ask further, simply nodding her head. It wasn’t a bad choice, considering she would find out the next day anyway.

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Chapter 905

The next day, rain began to fall in the south from the morning.

“It’s quite rare for it to rain this often, even though I’ve lived in the south all my life. I was worried that the mood might be bad because of the hailstorm last time, but thankfully, it seems fine despite that…”

Gakane, stretching his hand out of the window as if to gauge the rain, had a remarkably serious expression. Yuder, realizing anew that he too was from the south, felt a sense of kinship.

‘That’s right. He’s also from the south… Was it Ulan where he said he was from?’

Ulan was a region quite far from Charloin. Hence, despite Gakane’s recent visit to the south, he had yet to meet his family and hometown folks.

Other members from the southern branch had arrived early and had the chance to show off their splendid success to their families and acquaintances. Gakane, however, had not had such an opportunity, which Yuder now found somewhat concerning.

Gakane himself, as if he wasn’t from the south, never mentioned such matters and lived cheerfully.

Knowing the humiliating incidents Gakane had suffered, solely because he was from a fallen noble family, Yuder didn’t want to just let him leave. Probably, the other Cavalry members would agree.

Yuder, lost in thought for a moment, finally spoke.

“Gakane.”

“Hm?”

“Did you contact your family to tell them you’re here?”

“I did. They wanted to come, but I told them not to because it’s dangerous. Why?”

“That’s good. But you should prepare so they can come to Charloin anytime.”

“Uh… Why?”

“Because there will be an occasion for it.”

Currently, Herne was focusing on managing the aftermath of the Hail Night, postponing the Second Prince’s funeral and the Duke’s post-mortem affairs. Originally unthinkable, but with the First Princess Myra postponing her title succession ceremony to take action, no one dared to object.

However, the postponed funeral and title succession would eventually have to be resumed.

Yuder thought that would probably be after all the current preparations were completed.

‘Then, it would be a good opportunity to invite the Bolunwald family. It will also be a chance to show the fools of the south who Gakane really is.’

Thinking about the aftermath before it even happened would have been considered rash by the old Yudrain Aile. But now, Yuder didn’t mind imagining Gakane and the Bolunwald family standing proudly before the fools once everything was over.

With his mood lifted, even the falling rain seemed insignificant.

“What occasion are you talking about…? You don’t mean something like Ulan falling apart and us having to come here… Not in a bad sense, right…?”

Gakane asked, looking puzzled and uneasy, but there was no time to answer. Someone greeted them from behind.

“You’re here. Mr. Yuder! Greetings, Mr. Gakane.”

“Oh, Priest?”

Lusan, with his hair grown long and casually tied back, approached with a smile. Yuder nodded to him and then spoke.

“You arrived a bit earlier than scheduled.”

“The work finished sooner than expected.”

“Great. Let’s set off then.”

“Huh? Where are you going with the Priest?”

Gakane, unaware of Yuder’s plans for the day, asked in confusion.

“Nothing special, just some matters we need to attend to together.”

“Ah… I see. Understood. Then, finish your work well, and see you later!”

Gakane, quick-wittedly, did not ask any further details and tactfully vacated his place. Yuder started moving towards the stairs leading underground, accompanied by Lusan. Lusan, with a slightly tense expression, asked:

“The person you said we’re going together with today, that’s the… new arrival, the successful candidate, right?”

“Yes. You can call her Gloe.”

The companion Gloe was curious about yesterday was indeed Lusan.

Yuder chose him to assist in Aton’s interrogation for one reason: he was a Priest of the Sun God.

Aton was a remarkable swordsman, hailing from the ‘Udaquan’, a class of priests who believed in the Black Moon faith, a belief unique to the southern countries.

According to Kishiar, the Udaquans held immense pride in being the chosen children of the moon, unhesitant in using weapons for their faith and not shying away from killing.

At that time, Kishiar also remarked:

‘Even the most meticulous of spies, who have expertly hidden their true intentions while dealing with many people, reveal their approach once you know their background and identity. To provoke a priest, theology is the best tool, and for those of high stature with excessive confidence in their abilities, nothing works better than the name of someone who has crushed them.’

The latter strategy had already been employed using Yuder’s name and presence. Initially, Aton was quite shaken, but as time passed, he regained his composure and no longer easily faltered at the sight of Yuder.

Therefore, Yuder thought, if that unwavering, tenacious resolve stemmed from his identity as a priest, wouldn’t it be resolved by bringing their own priest, as Kishiar suggested?

Lusan was already briefed on everything. He was quite shocked to learn that Aton, who had caused tremendous trouble, was actually a Udaquan from the south, but as a Priest, his interest was also strongly piqued.

“I’ve heard about the Udaquans too. The head priest of the temple where I grew up had long researched this area. It’s a pity he’s not here; he would have been more helpful…”

“Has he passed away?”

“Oh… No, that’s not it. It’s just that since it’s not my specialty, I thought it would be good to consult him and delve deeper into the study. It’s a temporary measure, but…”

“Then do it.”

“Really? But the temple where I lived is really far from here… Even if we exchange letters, it will take a long time.”

“If you use ordinary postal birds, that is.”

Lusan’s hometown was in the northeastern countryside. The head priest there, quite advanced in age, was still healthy, tending to the temple and caring for children.

If distance was the only issue, then power could solve it, couldn’t it? Yuder reported the matter to Kishiar. Kishiar conveyed the news to the fastest possible messenger, the Emperor, and Emperor Keilusa arranged for the quickest courier between the capital and the northeast.

While the journey from the south to the northeast was slow, the distance from the capital to the northeast was not so far. Unbeknownst to Lusan, letters filled with greetings and theological queries for the head priest were swiftly shuttled across various regions.

And so, it came to be today.

Priest for a priest.

Theology with theology.

‘Let’s see if you react today like you did the last time.’

“Hmm. But I wonder if I can really be of any help.”

As they descended, Lusan murmured with a slightly anxious face.

“Thanks to the head priest, I’ve learned things I didn’t know before… but if the person we’re interrogating doesn’t open their mouth until the end, I’m not sure if I can even hold a conversation.”

“Don’t worry about that. Even if it doesn’t work, we’re no worse off than before.”

“That’s reassuring then…”

Yuder reassured Lusan by saying it’s alright even if it doesn’t work, but in truth, he didn’t think so.

‘Priests are one of the most stubborn about their beliefs. That means, if one can endure being provoked about it, they probably wouldn’t be a priest in the first place.’

Even Lusan, a model of a good and diligent Priest, became quite talkative when it came to the Sun God’s scriptures or doctrines. Yuder had seen him discussing these matters with Alik numerous times.

‘And very passionately, too.’

If a Priest of the Sun God, gentle and warm like sunlight, was like that, how much more would someone be who doesn’t hesitate to use the sword for their faith?

Yuder guessed it wouldn’t be any less intense.

Upon reaching the entrance to the underground dungeon, Yuder paused for a moment. Gloe was already there, clinging close to Reneve, as if they had been chatting while waiting.

“You’re here early.”

“Yes… Hello…”

“You must be Gloe. I’m Lusan, the one joining you today. I’m a Priest attached to the Cavalry medical unit. Pleased to meet you.”

“Ah… Yes, Priest. Please, it’s a pleasure.”

Gloe seemed surprised to be accompanied by a Priest, something she hadn’t anticipated.

“Shall we go in now?”

“We need to wait for the Commander.”

“There he is, the Commander.”

Just as Yuder responded to Lusan’s query, a relaxed voice came from the direction of the stairs. Kishiar, dressed in a crisp white Commander’s uniform, approached leisurely, waving in greeting.

“Sorry for being the last to arrive. I was delayed meeting someone.”

The brightness of his smile could have been mistaken for a sunny day, had they not known they were underground and it was raining outside.

Yuder blinked at the familiar face following Kishiar.

‘Nathan Zuckerman… He’s returned.’

A face that hadn’t been there just that morning now followed Kishiar, as if he had never been away. His return meant Kanna and the others had returned too. Yuder guessed whom Kishiar had been meeting.

‘He must have heard the results of Nahan’s life and death investigation. I’m curious, but it’s not something to be discussed right now.’

The timely return of assets like Nathan and Kanna was more relieving to Yuder than anything else.

“Nathan. You’ll guard the entrance. I’ll be back shortly.”

“Understood.”

“And Reneve. It’s a tough ask, but I’m counting on you as promised.”

“Of course.”

Reneve, who had been sitting guarding the entrance, smiled brightly. Nathan Zuckerman didn’t exchange introductions or greetings with others. However, just before standing guard as ordered by Kishiar, he gave Yuder a brief nod.

Yuder returned the gesture with a nod of his own and followed Kishiar inside.

As they stood before the cell where Aton was held, Kishiar stopped and turned to Yuder, smiling.

“I’ll observe from here.”

“Ah… Commander, aren’t you coming in?”

To Lusan’s question, Kishiar nodded.

“If I go in, the one inside might get provoked in a bad way. Don’t worry, I’ll be watching.”

“Understood.”

Yuder was the first to open the door and step inside. Following him were Gloe and Lusan, and then the door closed behind them.

Aton, who had been hanging his head, slowly lifted his gaze to look at Yuder and then at the two people behind him. A dry, mocking laugh escaped his lips.

“It seems you’ve brought quite a few friends today. What’s the occasion?”

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Chapter 906

“It seems you’ve brought quite a few friends today. What’s the occasion?”

The intent to intimidate Gloe and Lusan was palpable in the gloomy, flickering light of the eyes, reminiscent of a captured beast. However, neither Gloe nor Lusan seemed to be easily perturbed.

‘I thought as much for Gloe, a fortune teller from a wandering troupe, accustomed to all sorts of people… But Lusan seems to have grown significantly stronger in spirit than before.’

Gloe’s current lack of confidence in her abilities was apparent. Yet, independently of this, she had a history of surviving against numerous odds while casting fortunes in the wandering troupe. In her previous life, she rarely showed emotional fluctuation when dealing with people, a testament to her resilience. It seemed little had changed in that regard.

Lusan, too, seemed to have hardened significantly after being indiscriminately attacked by Nahan and subsequently recovering.

‘I had prepared a contingency plan, fearing they might react or be frightened by that brute’s demeanor… It seems unnecessary now.’

Aton furrowed his brows in surprise as his attempts to rattle them elicited no reaction. Though they appeared as meek herbivores, being part of the Cavalry, none should be underestimated.

Yuder was now determined to firmly impress this fact upon him.

“Do you remember your fallen comrades who, as you put it, ‘shook the balance of the South’?” Yuder said, pulling a chair in front of Aton and sitting down. The ones Yuder referred to had hidden in Star of Nagran’s southern base, seeking cooperation, only to choose self-destruction just before being subdued by the Cavalry.

“The words they shouted before their deaths, I later learned, were phrases added at the end of prayers in the South. Unusual last words, I thought, so I sought advice from many, including the priests here.”

“…”

“Well, I haven’t found a definite answer yet. But one of the priests here raised an interesting point.”

Yuder casually turned his gaze to Lusan.

“What did you say then, Priest?”

“…War is a human affair. Historically, numerous wars have erupted across the continent, but those who believe in God have always maintained an unwritten rule not to directly intervene in wars among humans in the name of God. It was a matter of course for us, followers of the Sun God, but, as I understand, the same was true for your followers of the Black Moon.”

This was a little-known fact, but it had been an official discussion long ago between the Sun God and Black Moon faiths. A thousand years ago, after narrowly escaping destruction, both faiths held a leaders’ summit, each represented by their respective figures: the Pope for the Sun God and Udaquan for the Black Moon. The records are largely lost, so the specifics of their conversation and the reasons for the meeting remain unclear.

However, it was certain that after that dialogue, both faiths established the unwritten rule not to interfere in human wars, focusing instead on safeguarding their respective faiths in their own realms.

In an era unimaginable now, at the very dawn of the Empire, there were shrines to the Black Moon faith scattered about, and records existed of Udaquans roaming the lands. Modern theologians and historians speculate that perhaps, in ancient times, the Black Moon faith wasn’t confined to the South as it is now but was spread across the entire continent. Of course, further research was prohibited by the strict taboos of the Sun God faith.

The head priest, whom Lusan sought for knowledge, believed that finding and studying such records held historical and religious significance. After explaining in detail the aforementioned matters and the discussions that took place back then, he relayed to Lusan.

Lusan, I won't ask why you've suddenly taken an interest in Udaquan and the Black Moon faith. However, my research suggests that their core and role aren't much different from ours. Although our methods may differ, we both prioritize following the words of our God above all else.

This implied that, like the Sun God faith, following God's words was the most critical aspect.

Of course, just as there were corrupt and self-serving priests among the followers of the Sun God, like the Elder Priest Bertrail Shand Apeto, it wouldn't be impossible for the Udaquan followers.

However, Aton did not seem like one who would recklessly deviate on his own. Considering the scale of the various operations and financial transactions he had conducted while holding Duke Tain in his grasp, and the number of subordinates disguised as merchants, it was evident that many were lurking behind him.

After learning this much, Lusan said to Aton,

"For decades, perhaps centuries, numerous conflicts have erupted along the borders. Yet, like the Sun God faith, your Black Moon faith never once stepped forward in the name of the faith itself."

"…"

"Then why was it different this time? Why would the devout, praying the Black Sleep's prayers as they died, break God's commandment they've upheld for a thousand years and actively engage in the forefront?"

After speaking rapidly, Lusan paused to catch his breath, then looked straight into Aton's eyes and concluded,

“I can think of two reasons. One, the situation within the South has changed so drastically that even those who believe in the Moon are forced to partake in these destructive and terrible acts.”

Or,

“Two, the entity planning and executing all this belongs to the core of the Black Moon faith. …Which is it?”

“…Ha-ha.”

Aton, who had been silently listening, now showed a different reaction. With a laugh, he scrutinized Lusan’s face with an entirely new intensity.

“Until now, I’ve never set foot in your temple, nor have I been this close to a priest or Priest of the Sun God. An interesting one has come, knowing so much.”

“…”

“But there is no reason for me to answer that. O believer of the Sun.”

“The idea that those who profess faith in a god would lead the charge in harming others and fueling the world’s chaos, without any guilt, is unthinkable to me. Is that what your god teaches? I don’t think so.”

Aton’s eyes twitched slightly at Lusan’s calm yet somewhat provocative remark. “How dare you insult my God and my faith with your limited knowledge?”

“If that’s not the case, why not simply answer? It seems in your belief, isn’t there a saying that those who cannot speak the truth have no right to confess to their God with truthful lips.”

Yuder couldn’t discern the religious significance of the quote Lusan cited. However, Aton responded sharply, his voice bristling with sensitivity.

“I have never once been unfaithful to my beliefs.”

“Then, is it true that the core of your faith stands behind you?”

Lusan quickly countered, as if reeling in a fish that had taken the bait. This question sparked a conversation filled with sharp exchanges, complex doctrines, and various quotations. Contrary to his earlier apprehensions, Lusan spoke eloquently. Yuder, who was accustomed to seeing him eagerly learn herbology beside Enon with sparkling eyes, was deeply impressed by this completely different aspect.

‘No need to worry, after all.’

Indeed, fitting for a Priest of the Cavalry. While Aton had been like a stone, letting everything slide off him during Yuder’s interrogation, he couldn’t endure even thirty minutes of conversation with Lusan without grinding his teeth and showing unprecedented emotional agitation.

“You have a talent for twisting words. Just like despicable usurpers.”

Despite claiming he had no reason to answer, Aton reacted profusely as soon as the name of God was mentioned. Yuder, observing Aton during his dialogue with Lusan, meticulously noted every detail, from the slight changes in his pupils to every shift in his breathing.

And now was the moment Yuder felt Aton’s breath quicken the most. He immediately opened his mouth and spoke.

“Gloe, now is the time.”

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Chapter 907

“Gloe, now is the time.”

“Ah, yes!”

Gloe swiftly responded, retrieving a bundle of cards from her embrace. The ongoing argument between Lusan and Aton subsided momentarily. Yuder, unable to conceal his displeasure, pretended not to notice the change in Aton and spoke with his usual demeanor.

“Shall we make a bet at this juncture?”

“…A bet?”

“I usually don’t label others as persistent or terrible, but I’ve come to think you’re an exception. Nevertheless, we still have time here, so we should do something, right? That’s why I’ve prepared this.”

“…”

“This individual here is a fortune teller from a wandering troupe, skilled in card reading.”

“So, you’re suggesting a bet based on card reading now?”

“How do you bet with a reading? Stop talking nonsense and look at these cards.”

Aton, furrowing his brows at Yuder’s cold remark, glanced at the cards Gloe was holding. Gloe’s cards were nothing special, commonly available across the continent and frequently used in various card games.

Of course, the style of the illustrations on the cards was slightly unique, and some special cards used only in games were omitted, though quite worn. However, this did not hinder their use in a game.

“You know what these cards are. Given your history with Duke Tain and gambling, that much is clear.”

“…”

“Let’s play a game among us here. If you can outscore even one of us, I’ll stop the interrogation and leave immediately. You’ll be able to rest here for a while.”

“…”

“And if you manage to beat me, and not Priest or Gloe, I’ll answer your questions to the best of my knowledge.”

“What?”

Surprised by the unexpected proposal, even Lusan and Gloe blinked in astonishment. However, Aton, without responding, skeptically glared at Yuder.

“This is absurd. Why should I do that? What assurance do I have?”

“Then continue your fervent debate with the Priest. To be honest, after observing your conversation with the Priest, you seem heavily linked to the Black Moon Faith. So, after today, it might be best to consult with the Sun God Faith and continue the interrogation formally. It’s regrettable that I won’t uncover it myself, but it can’t be helped.”

To Aton, these words might sound like an intention to hand him over to the Sun God Faith.

‘He probably doubts how close the Faith and the Cavalry are.’

According to his earlier words to Lusan, even during his infiltration of the empire, Aton never stepped foot near the Sun God temple. The hostility and intense dislike he showed towards Lusan, more than Yuder, gave an insight into how different his identity as a knight and Awakener was from his identity as a priest.

‘The former might be a matter of pride for him, but the latter would feel like a denial of his entire life and roots.’

The reaction was much more definitive than expected when Lusan was summoned. Hence, there was nothing left to do but exploit the weakness with all his might.

“Officially, the Imperial Grand Temple does not acknowledge any other gods. Naturally, heretics are also objects of rejection. If they are offered the chance to interrogate a criminal like you, who willingly walked into their grasp, I imagine many would be quite delighted. Especially since you were already the talk of the town due to the affair with Duke Tain. If the temple learns something, it would be a double victory for them.”

“…”

“Your name will be known in your homeland as a traitor and one who knelt before the name of another god. That is, if you’re still alive by then.”

Aton’s eyes burned brighter than ever before, filled with fury and hatred, glaring at Yuder as if to tear him apart.

“…So you’re saying you’ll kill me in the most dishonorable way.”

“If you’re going to die anyway, what does it matter if it’s honorable or not?”

“Ha. Do you think I came here without preparing for even that?”

“I merely suggested a game. If you don’t like it, refuse. It’s just your loss of a final chance to beat me. I don’t care. The rest is up to the temple.”

The Cavalry is busy. There are many things to do, so there’s no time to waste on the likes of you. If you refuse, the rest is not my concern. Yuder made his stance clear.

“…If I had my sword, I would have torn you apart right here.”

Yuder, unfazed by Aton’s cursed tone, coldly scoffed.

“Seems you’ve forgotten, even with your sword, you couldn’t lay a scratch on me.”

“…”

“Puffing up your pride while being so weak doesn’t scare anyone. Know your place.”

“I could beat you here with bare fists.” The moment he said that, Aton clenched his teeth, a grinding sound filling the air. His jaw tightened, and his eyes blazed with bloodshot veins. Yuder thought coldly.

‘Such a definite reaction.’

If this was the attitude of one who boasted of his readiness, he should revise what readiness means.

In the Southern countries, the roles of knights and priests are akin to that of nobility in the Empire. Although he must have prepared himself for a lot when he came to the Empire as a spy, a person who lived a life of noble responsibility wouldn’t want to die in the most filthy and miserable way, his identity tarnished.

That’s how the nobles Yuder knew were, and Aton was no exception.

His face, which had remained proud and dignified even under prolonged interrogation, now showed significant cracks.

“….You.”

“So, will you do it or not? Answer quickly. There’s an interrogation to do anyway, and we need to do something in the remaining time. I’m not particularly keen on it either.”

To put it mildly, he even brought someone who could read cards. Glancing at Gloe’s cards, her cheeks slightly flushed.

‘I did well to explain beforehand that most of what is said here is false.’

Yuder watched Aton, who struggled to respond, then sighed deeply and leaned back in his chair. His eyes, half-lidded and expressionless, fixed on Aton, causing him to stiffen.

“Think clearly. If you know what honor is, you would understand which is better to converse with - me, who will beat you honorably, or the temple. I’ll give you one last chance.”

“…”

“Gloe, Priest. Please sit down. Let’s start the cards.”

Even though Aton did not respond, Yuder issued an order. Gloe and Lusan promptly pulled chairs nearby and sat down.

“Commander’s Assistant, what… kind of card game will we be playing?”

“If we’re looking for the simplest game for four players, it would be ‘Cloverleaf.’”

Cloverleaf was the easiest and most straightforward card game for four players. It allowed for scoring zero and ranking, and the time to get into the game was relatively short.

Gloe, with a tense face, gripped the cards tightly, then began shuffling and dealing. In that moment, Yuder noticed a faint shimmer of power emanating from her fingers but casually ignored it and spoke.

“Aton. If you manage to beat me, I will do more than just answer your questions. I’ll grant you a favor to some extent. For instance, I could… agree to another duel.”

“…”

Aton let out a baffled snort. His glaring eyes were a mix of incredulity and various emotions. Most were tinged with feelings deserving of harsh and negative words, but not all of them.

“You’re not someone who’s just interrogated a few, Yuder Aile. How old are you, really? I’ve never heard of someone like you.”

“What would you do with my age? Even though you’re older, you’re no more experienced than me. What’s there to boast about?”

“The cards… are all dealt.”

Before Aton could react angrily, Gloe finished her task and raised her hand.

‘Good. Aton hasn’t realized that Gloe already used her abilities.’

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Chapter 908

‘Good. Aton hasn’t realized that Gloe already used her abilities.’

It was all for this moment that Yuder had deliberately instigated a heated conversation between him and Lusan, feigning nonchalance and impulsively suggesting a card game.

To use Gloe’s power without Aton’s knowledge, two conditions were necessary.

Firstly, Reneve, who was suppressing powers throughout the entire underground dungeon, had to withdraw her force in a specific area at the precise moment.

Secondly, at the moment Gloe used her power, Aton had to be distracted enough not to notice.

When an Awakener uses their power, a subtle flow of energy inevitably occurs. In cases where the power is as visible as magic, anyone would quickly realize its use. However, even when it’s not as apparent, those sensitive to such energies could detect the changes.

At this point in time, when Awakeners were a recent phenomenon, it would be no exaggeration to say that besides Yuder, no one possessed such acute sensitivity. Plus Reneve and Gloe belonged to the category of those whose power usage couldn’t immediately be detected without seeing it with their own eyes.

But the adversary was Aton. He was an Awakener, a priest of the Black Moon, and a swordsman with skills nearly akin to a swordmaster.

Yuder thought that someone with Aton’s abilities and senses might detect the slight changes when someone used their power. He especially considered the moment when Reneve withdrew her power to be risky.

‘The dungeon is quiet and confined. In such a place, anyone’s senses become more acute than usual.’

Therefore, Yuder had unreservedly used Lusan and himself to confuse Aton’s senses and distract him. Anyone who knew Yuder even a little would realize that such an impulsive proposal was not in his nature, but Aton, after all, had no real knowledge of Yuder’s personality or character.

‘He’ll never know either.’

Had Yuder come alone as he had during the previous interrogation, it would have been ineffective. However, Lusan had successfully discomposed Aton, allowing the plan to progress smoothly.

‘If he had been as faithless as me, it wouldn’t have worked at all.’

Yuder briefly appreciated Kishiar’s insight for revealing such an effective method of interrogation. By now, Kishiar would be outside, observing everything with a smile. In fact, Kishiar had taken on the role of signaling Reneve to temporarily halt her power in this space at the right moment.

In essence, to deceive Aton, more than five individuals were involved.

‘It’s certainly a cumbersome method.’

If Aton could have been easily overthrown by torture or persuasion, there would have been no need for this.

But Yuder knew that a man like him would never waver with violence or sweet words. If Yuder had treated him roughly, Aton would have been pleased, striving for an honorable death.

‘Why would I do such a thing for anyone’s sake?’

The chance to capture a high-ranking spy of Aton’s caliber intact was uncertain in the future.

Aton and the enemies behind him were incredibly secretive, thorough, and meticulous. Even Yudrain Aile of his previous life had not fully realized

until his death that they were involved in all these matters.

If Aton had not dawdled unnecessarily in the south and stubbornly decided not to repay his debt to the Cavalry, capturing him might have been impossible.

Therefore, Yuder wanted to obtain definite answers without any doubt while Aton was still in sound mind and body.

And now, with the optimal environment for Gloe to use her power established, it was time to see if the desired result would materialize.

“I have one leaf. Gloe has two. The priest is three. And you, Aton, make four.”

The ‘Cloverleaf’ game began with cards being distributed according to the number of small patterns drawn on the corners. The cards Yuder received had patterns resembling leaves, each with only one drawn.

“Then, I shall start.”

Since the order usually followed the number of leaves, Yuder shuffled his cards first and then picked up a stack from the center. The new card in his hand had three leaves drawn on its corner, a common picture.

‘A regular card.’

Three leaves meant it was Lusan’s card. In this way, each player drew cards in turn and rotated them according to the rules. The game’s aim was to have the most cards with one’s own pattern and the highest scoring cards when the last card in the center disappeared.

It was simple, but it required a fair bit of strategy to protect and accumulate one’s cards while hindering others.

That is, if one played honestly.

Yuder, keeping a poker face, glanced around while scanning his cards. Gloe was bent over, her long, unruly hair almost covering her face. Lusan, with a

face that clearly showed he was almost inexperienced in such games, frantically examined and fiddled with his and the central cards.

And Aton, while glaring at Yuder, was holding his cards properly despite his hands being bound by a knight's restraint. He held them at an angle that prevented others from seeing, clearly experienced in such matters.

'He must think it's dubious yet easy, as winning against just one of us frees him from this interrogation.'

Yuder figured that if he were Aton, he wouldn't consider winning against the others important in this situation. Aton, in his heightened state, would surely aim to strike Yuder at once.

But…

"…With all cards flipped, let's calculate the scores. I have 25 points and am first, the priest has 20 points for second, the Commander's Assistant has 18 points for third, and you… have 17 points for fourth."

After flipping the last card and quickly calculating the scores, Gloe let out a long breath and laid down her cards. Aton's eyes shook uncontrollably as he saw the four stacks of cards revealed on the table and the final results.

"What is this…?"

"Too bad. You lost by one point."

"…"

Aton clenched his hands bound by the restraint. He glared at the cards in disbelief, then turned his gaze towards Yuder.

"…What trickery is this?"

"Would I have only managed third place if I had resorted to tricks? Why blame others for your own stupidity, Aton?"

Aton’s fist trembled again. Yuder, with a cold laugh, nonchalantly shuffled the cards and pushed them toward Aton.

“We still have some time left. Shall we start again from the loser this time?”

“…”

“Isn’t it generous of me? Life rarely offers a second chance, yet here I am giving you a second opportunity.”

Of course, Yuder Aile himself was an exception to this rule. However, Aton and the others could not possibly know that. Except for the one person observing from the outside.

Yuder closed his eyes briefly, then reopened them. Aton, his eyes conflicted, slowly started shuffling and redistributing the cards. This time, the cards Yuder received were adorned with three leaves.

Soon, the second game ended. Yuder was second, and once again, Aton narrowly finished last.

“Still think it’s not a trick?”

“Don’t you see the order of the revealed cards? If you hadn’t forcibly swapped that card, the second-to-last one you picked, with mine, you would have been first.”

“…”

“Well, with such terrible luck, it’s no wonder everything you do ends in failure and brought you here.”

Aton’s fingertips trembled more noticeably than before. Yuder continued with his icy appraisal.

“With such mediocre skills, how did you manage to deceive Duke Tain? Tell me your secret. Or, are the gamblers in the imperial capital even worse than us?”

“…One more time.”

“What? Speak up. I can’t hear you.”

“Isn’t it the rule of ‘Cloverleaf’ to play rounds equal to the number of participants? Then, we haven’t finished yet. Let’s play another round.”

Aton’s eyes were strangely red as he spoke, yet he seemed unaware of his own oddity.

Yuder stared intently at the last card in the stack in front of him. It depicted a fairy with notably large lips, sitting on a petal, laughing uproariously.

‘Truth.’

Yuder’s gaze naturally drifted to Gloe, sitting beside him. She nodded slightly. Droplets of sweat could be seen weaving through her curly, long hair.

Yuder sighed softly, almost as if he hadn’t seen Gloe, and chuckled lowly.

“Weren’t you reluctant before?”

“…”

“Fine. Even if you win, it’s not like we lose anything besides leaving here quickly. Let’s do it. Is everyone else okay with it?”

“Ah, yes… Surprisingly, I might have some talent. It’s become rather… interesting as we continue.”

“That’s enough to say you have talent. If you want to try other card games later, ask the other guys. There are quite a few who enjoy this; they’ll teach you the rules well. Gloe?”

“I’m… okay with it.”

“Great. Then let’s play the third round.”

Yuder praised the bashful Lusan, ignoring Aton's increasingly sour expression. "You shuffle it this time, too."

As soon as Yuder finished speaking, Aton roughly grabbed and started shuffling the deck. His manner was different from before, when he had been cautious, as if searching for any hidden tricks.

His hands moved urgently, and his eyes were slightly bloodshot.

Gloe's power was manifesting its effects.

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Chapter 909

Gloe’s power was manifesting its effects.

Yuder gazed at the intermingling cards, recalling the moment from last night when he realized the new possibilities of his own power after meeting Gloe.

“Even though you said it’s okay to fail… I’m still not sure if what the Commander’s Assisstant mentioned is really possible.”

Deciding to give it a try was one thing, but believing in something untried was another matter entirely. If Gloe hadn’t been anxious, Yuder would have doubted her state of mind.

“So, you’ve come to check in advance, haven’t you? Have you already used today’s power?”

“No.”

“Then, try it now.”

“To the Commander’s Assistant?”

“Yes.”

“…You said we’re checking its use in the opposite way of a blessing, didn’t you?”

Gloe’s eyes trembled relentlessly.

“I said I’d check, so it’s only right to use it on me. Whom else did you think you would test it on?”

Yuder, undeterred, extended his hand while sitting.

“Just like before, have me draw a card. We’re both busy; let’s finish this quickly.”

“No, but… if a card with a very bad meaning is drawn, something bad might happen to the Commander’s Assistant…! I can’t do it.”

“Weren’t you just saying it seemed impossible, and now you’re worried about me?”

Yuder’s calm question made Gloe’s cheeks flush.

“There’s always a slim chance. The Commander’s Assistant is a kind person who recognizes my ability and is a hero of the Empire… I don’t want you to suffer because of my power.”

Her personality, much younger than he remembered, wasn’t much different from her previous life.

As Yuder looked at her and chuckled, Kishiar, who had been observing from behind, solemnly intervened.

“It’s a good attitude. So, it might be better to test it on this vase instead?”

“…”

When the Commander who followed behind told Gloe to think of him as a slightly larger flower vase, she didn’t know what to do. It was clear he was just joking, but a newly approved person like her couldn’t guess that far. Yuder, without blinking an eye, only looked at Gloe and responded.

“The vase is a bit noisy, just ignore it.”

“…Really? But it’s the Commander…”

“Where do you see the Commander? Here is only a vase. Look this way, not there.”

Looking directly at Kishiar could be toxic. Even Yuder sometimes forgot what he was thinking and got caught up when making eye contact, so it was

better not to look at him at all. That was precisely why Yuder was focusing only on Gloe, not looking behind.

“…Yes.”

“Oh. Although it’s the destiny of a vase to be beautiful until someone looks at it, it’s a bit lonely.”

“Commander’s Assistant, is it really okay to ignore him?”

Gloe asked urgently.

“Yes.”

Only after Yuder’s confident response did Gloe finally draw out the cards. It seemed that Kishiar’s presence made her eager to finish quickly.

As she spread out the cards and skillfully shuffled them, about to draw five cards just like before, Yuder raised his hand to stop her movement.

“Wait.”

“Yes?”

“When do you feel your power being exerted and the strength draining away? Is it now?”

“Ah… No.”

Gloe was flustered. As expected, she had never before considered that aspect of her power. She had only used her ability in the familiar way it had first manifested.

But it was okay. Yuder already knew the answer.

“It’s just that I do it that way when I cast the fortunes, and the moment I feel the power draining is… when the person draws a card… and then…”

“Was it when you recite the name of the card?”

“Yes. That’s right… it was.”

He asked her to remember the time she had bestowed a blessing upon him. The moment a faint power surged from the card and seeped into Yuder was precisely when Gloe had recited ‘Festival of the Trumpeting Jester’.

So, the act of reading fortunes was not necessarily a required process for Gloe’s power to manifest.

Of course, doing so was the most useful way to utilize her power. It allowed her to exhibit an almost prophetic accuracy, a special ability incomparable to any other.

However, in her previous life, Gloe couldn’t afford the luxury of just sitting quietly and casting fortunes for others, nor did she wish to. Thus, she sought ways to wield her power beyond mere fortune-telling.

“Then, the important thing is just one. You being aware of which card you are giving.”

“…Ah.”

Yuder’s words made Gloe’s expression change, as if she was on the brink of understanding something. Listening while retracing the process of using her ability with the cards in front of her seemed to bring some realization.

“Let’s continue.”

Gloe slowly drew five cards and laid them face down before Yuder. He looked down at them and spoke.

“Think about it. Right now, both of us don’t know what these five cards are. Correct?”

“Yes.”

“If I were to pick a card and hide it so only I can see it, would your power manifest?”

“…I don’t think so.”

“What if, on the contrary, you knew in advance which card I was going to pick before I flipped it? How about then?”

After a long moment of perplexed thought, Gloe finally answered with difficulty.

“It might manifest. I haven’t tried, but…”

“Then, depending on how you interpret the meaning written on it, different powers could manifest as well, right? Does my suggestion still sound absurd?”

“…No.”

Mental abilities depend greatly on the belief of the user. Nahan, now gone, had been the one who most cunningly exploited this, and Gloe in her previous life was not far behind in skill.

The moment Gloe believes it might work, even the impossible can become possible.

“The power ultimately changes based on the direction you choose to wield it. It’s naturally harder than the way you usually use it. But after all, it’s your power. Just because I am the one drawing the card doesn’t mean I am using your power. Don’t forget that.”

“…My own power…”

Yuder, with a distant look in his eyes, gazed at Gloe murmuring to herself, then chose one of the five cards. He closed his eyes, flipped it over, and presented it to Gloe at an angle where he couldn’t see it himself. Then, he opened his eyes.

“Now. What card is it?”

Gloe’s expression subtly changed as she took the card.

“In my previous self, I would have said it was a blessing that could avoid minor water-related dangers.”

“And the opposite meaning?”

“…It would be a bit of misfortune related to water.”

As she spoke, Gloe slowly flipped the card to reveal it. It depicted a salmon-like fish leaping powerfully out of the water. Yuder nodded vigorously, urging her, who hesitated to speak its name. Finally, Gloe cautiously called out the name of the card.

“The Inevitable Fish.”

Whoosh. It was the moment when a transparent haze rose from the card, about to seep into Yuder.

The haze, as if suddenly jerked back by something, paused in its motion and quivered.

Then, it was pulled away to somewhere, vanishing as if it had never existed.

“…Hic!”

Gloe trembled, shuddering at a sensation she had never experienced before.

“What, what was that just now?”

For the first time, Yuder turned to look at the vase that had been quiet until then. The vase, having existed beautifully in its place as he had said, now twisted its eyes and smiled softly at him. The culprit who had perfectly timed the interception of Gloe’s power from reaching Yuder, and pushed it away in the blink of an eye, was right there.

“…The power was intercepted before it could affect me.”

“How… how is that possible?”

The impact on Gloe wasn’t severe, as the manifested power was just a minor misfortune and wasn’t blocked harshly. She was just startled by the unfamiliar experience. As the shock subsided, she grew intensely curious about how her power had been blocked, but Yuder simply told her to ponder it during training and swiftly changed the subject.

“…Anyway, it seems you now understand the important part. Tomorrow, you will play a card game against someone with me, using your abilities.”

“A game, you say?”

“It won’t be a difficult game. The important thing is, you need to use your power naturally during the game, just like you did now.”

“Even if it’s not casting fortunes… I think I understand that I can use the power. I’m not sure how well it’ll go… But then, you mean to make that person draw the cursed card you want during the game… Are you expecting me to do that too?”

People from the wandering troupe are skilled at sleight of hand. Gloe was adept at various tricks with her nimble fingers, but not at a professional level for card gambling. Yuder shook his head at her anxious look.

“No. I’ll handle that. Don’t worry.”

Yuder and Gloe lightly practiced a few card games as a demonstration, discussing various precautions and scenarios. Afterward, he sent her away. Now, only the man in the guise of a vase and Yuder were left.

“I didn’t know my assistant was so confident in card games?”

Kishiar asked naturally, as if he hadn’t just used any power.

“I didn’t either, but it won’t be the case tomorrow. Tonight, I plan to learn how to cheat well from someone who is the best at cards I know of.”

Even though Kishiar must have guessed what he would say, he burst into laughter with great amusement.

“Hmm. And who might that be?”

“Akit. Please inform me.”

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Chapter 910

“Akit. Please inform me.”

Uttering the name ‘Akit’ with emphasis was a deliberate attempt to link it to the memory of the street card game Kishiar had shown him on the day he first heard that name. Yuder’s recollections of how swiftly and skillfully Akit manipulated outcomes in those games, making it hard to discern whether he was a member of the imperial family or a professional gambler, remained vivid.

Yuder himself had never lived a life where he indulged in card games with others. His philosophy had always been to devote time to training instead, finding it far more interesting and enjoyable.

Yet, that didn’t mean he was ignorant of what card games were. They were quite popular among the Cavalry members, often involving small bets. During his time as the Cavalry Commander, Yuder knew several members who were deeply involved in using their abilities for gambling. Those caught in the act invariably faced severe consequences from Yuder, but there were always those who couldn’t resist using their skills for gambling.

This exposure made Yuder almost an expert in recognizing different types of games, their rules, and the telltale signs of a seasoned gambler, despite not actively participating himself. Judging from his numerous experiences, Kishiar’s skills in card games surpassed any gambling addict he had seen in his previous life, both in cunning and proficiency.

Kishiar had demonstrated an astonishing ability to win and lose in equal measure, in a pattern unnoticeable to others, during a game with fellow players. What chilled Yuder the most was that Kishiar achieved these results using mere sleight of hand, without any use of his abilities. No one present, not even Yuder with his keen eyesight and observation, could figure out how Kishiar had manipulated the game. Despite analyzing the game process afterward, Yuder was still at a loss about the methods used.

With such a skilled individual at hand, was there really a need to seek others to learn the art of deception in cards?

Facing Yuder's determined gaze, as if he wouldn't budge until taught, Kishiar remained silent for a moment, then covered his eyes and bowed his head.

"…Is it not unfair to suddenly call me by that name? I was hoping for a more thrilling back-and-forth conversation this time."

"I take it you're willing to teach me, then. Shall we start right away?"

"Just a moment. Let me calm my heart, which almost stopped from the shock."

Kishiar let out a laugh, indicative of defeat, and lowered his hand from his eyes. The sight of his red pupils, now focused and clear in both eyes, stirred something deep within Yuder's chest.

Ever since the day Kishiar's eyes rapidly returned to near-normal using a medium infused with the power of the Red Stone, Yuder hadn't had the chance to confirm if the recovery was complete without any aftereffects. However, in these moments indoors, there seemed to be no misalignment in his focus.

Yuder never voiced it, feeling it too sentimental, but he had felt as if he had regained something lost at the moment Kishiar unwrapped his bandages and looked straight ahead.

And now, he felt that same sensation.

Perhaps, even stronger than before…

"…"

"Let's begin."

Startled by Aton's wide-eyed declaration, Yuder paused in thought. The heap of cards allocated to him lay in front of him.

Leisurely flipping them over, Yuder focused on the sensations at his fingertips. The words Kishiar had taught him the previous night surfaced one after another in his mind.

“Each game has its own set of tricks you can pull off. For this task, it’s easier to master one thoroughly than to learn many superficially. I think the easiest to manipulate would be the ‘Cloverleaf’ game, so let’s try that.”

“You’re learning quickly. Is this really all? Ha, anyone else would still be grappling with the first sleight of hand.”

“The skill is important, but what really determines success or failure is how well you can distract your target’s attention and emotions. So, don’t teach the game to Lusan in advance. His genuine reactions will be enough to confuse Aton.”

Kishiar had mentioned that Aton’s frequent victories in gambling circles weren’t due to his exceptional skill, but rather the help of colleagues who manipulated the games without the other nobles’ knowledge.

“Aton often won because his colleagues, unknown to the other nobles, rigged the games. His gambling prowess was merely a means to make the other nobles reliant on him, not a sign of true skill.”

Duke Tain utilized the gambling houses frequented by the high nobility. And among the nobles, card games were not very popular these days.

“Use Aton’s overconfidence and arrogance, and exploit the vulnerabilities he’s unaware of. With the emotions that inevitably sway all humans and the few techniques I’ve taught you today, you should be able to achieve your goal…”

Yuder would certainly be able to grasp what he desires. The confident red eyes whispered so.

Following Kishiar’s advice, Yuder methodically shook Aton’s foundations, exploiting every moment his attention and mind wandered to employ the techniques Kishiar had taught him. The game had already begun with

Yuder’s calculated remark to Aton, “I usually don’t label others as persistent or terrible, but I’ve come to think you’re an exception.”

Blinded by the illusion of his own abilities, a mix of anger and excitement stirred within Aton, who held unwavering faith and pride. He showed little curiosity about Gloe, the card game’s mastermind. It was Gloe who had shuffled the cards at the game’s start, emerging victorious in the first round. This oversight proved to be Aton’s critical mistake.

Between Yuder, who skillfully captured Aton’s attention, and Lusan, who innocently acted the novice, Gloe played her part well.

Gloe, using her abilities, shuffled and selected five cards, which Yuder ensured ended up in Aton’s hand using the techniques learned from Kishiar. The hardest part was making Aton continuously pick specific cards without realizing it, but Lusan’s contribution was invaluable here.

As Kishiar had said, Lusan, unknowingly participating in the game, brought chaos to the table with his unaccustomed, erratic style. Of course, he tried his best, oblivious to what he was doing right or wrong.

According to Kishiar, the ‘Cloverleaf’ game appeared simple but became more intricate the deeper one delved into it. Unfamiliar players could only exhibit up to twenty-four patterns, no matter how hard they tried, and it was this fact that made Kishiar recommend the game.

“If you weren’t confident in memorizing all the patterns, I would have recommended a different game. But that’s not the case, is it?”

Indeed, it was true. Thanks to memorizing all the patterns overnight, Yuder was able to ensure that Lusan never finished last while dealing with Aton.

The ability of the card he so desired was simple. It was a card that, if blessed, would have protected the bearer from adverse speech and actions. However, it had rarely been used for blessings; in his previous life, Gloe mainly utilized it for curses. Those cursed by the card would lose consciousness or fall asleep unknowingly, and until they awoke, they would answer all questions truthfully.

The card's drawback was the unpredictability of how long it would take for the target to lose consciousness, but its value lay in the fact that the cursed person would have no recollection of what they had disclosed upon waking. Yuder, from his experiences in his past life, had already proven the veracity of the information gleaned this way.

Yuder informally called it the 'Card of Truth,' but it had another name, which was…

"Are you going to flip over the card you just snatched in the exchange?"

"Yes."

"What a pity. It doesn't seem to be the card you were hoping for, is it?"

"…Shut up."

In the second game, Aton had been duped by Yuder's trickery into forcibly exchanging a specific card, believing it to be of importance due to Yuder's manipulation.

Yuder, having forcibly exchanged cards with him, flipped the card and, seeing Aton's frown, coldly curled the corners of his lips.

Aton placed the card back down, flipping it so that everyone could see, following the rule that cards snatched in specific situations must be openly displayed until the game's end to prevent deceit.

Gloe, seated closest to Aton, spoke up with a slightly trembling voice, eyes downcast.

"The exchanged card is revealed, confirmed. It's the 'Faded Song of Joy'…"

As soon as Gloe pronounced its name, Yuder saw a faint haze swiftly enveloping Aton. However, in that critical moment, Aton's focus was not on the card but on Yuder. What mattered to him was the leaf and number on the stolen card and Yuder's reaction, not the card's name.

Aton’s anxiety over having failed in his crucial move, thinking it was Yuder’s important card, distracted him. He growled at Yuder to shut up, unaware of the subtle energy secretly infiltrating his being as the game concluded.

And now.

“It’s your turn, isn’t it? Don’t you have anything to play?”

Yuder slowly asked the question, looking at Aton who was slumped over with his head bowed. The sight of Aton, who had only gambled to deceive others, sprawled helplessly on the board created for his own capture, was amusing to Yuder.

After a long silence, Aton, still with his head down, responded in a barely audible whisper.

“…I don’t know what to play.”

His voice was distant, devoid of emotion.

Gloe and Lusan, witnessing the ‘Mouth of Truth’ open for the first time, both inhaled sharply in unison.

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Chapter 911

Gloe and Lusan, witnessing the ‘Mouth of Truth’ open for the first time, both inhaled sharply in unison.

“What is your name?”

Yuder asked with an impassive face, to which Aton mumbled something in an unintelligible southern language.

“Say it again in the imperial language.”

“The Wolf Rock Moonshade’s… Udaquan Aton Jin.”

So, he is Udaquan of Wolf Rock Moonshade. Yuder recalled the words of southern diplomats he had briefly encountered in a previous life.

The Southerners, having a tribal coalition system, often introduced themselves with a tribe, family name, or a word related to their occupation in front of their names, especially in formal situations, as their naming conventions were not consistent.

‘So, this name, Udaquan Aton Jin of Wolf Rock Moonshade, is used for formal introductions,’ Yuder concluded.

Yuder remembered this and turned his gaze towards Gloe and Lusan, who were barely able to breathe properly.

“It seems you can speak comfortably now. He appears to be completely caught in Gloe’s ability.”

“Her ability, you say? When exactly? Weren’t we just… playing a card game?”

Lusan, utterly bewildered, alternated his gaze between Gloe and the cards. From his perspective, he had merely followed instructions to converse with

Aton and play a few rounds of cards, so the abrupt conclusion was understandably disconcerting. Gloe, extremely tense and pale, clasped her hands tightly and let out a long, trembling breath.

“Priest, the truth is, I was secretly using my ability during the game.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I wasn’t sure if I would succeed, but… it seems I did, thanks to the help of the Commander’s Assistant.”

“He helped… you?”

Lusan’s eyes flickered rapidly with surprise. Yuder, leaving the confused Lusan aside, calmly praised Gloe.

“It must have been difficult since it was your first real attempt, but you did well. How do you feel?”

“I’m not sure… I’m still too shaky….”

Gloe was overwhelmed with excitement, realizing that her first attempt at using her ability this way had succeeded. It was natural for her to be unable to gauge her strength in such an agitated state.

‘It’s normal not to faint immediately after using such a significant and unfamiliar power. She’s probably still conscious due to the excitement.’

Yuder then advised her to take about ten deep breaths. After seeing some color return to her pale face, he asked again.

“How long do you think Aton will remain unconscious? Or can you not estimate that either?”

Gloe, looking at Aton, furrowed her brows and concentrated.

“I’m not certain, but it shouldn’t be too long… perhaps about the duration of a card game….”

“Understood. Then you should step outside for a moment, try to calm down and rest. If you feel like you might faint, make sure to tell the Priest.”

“Faint?”

Both Lusan and Gloe gasped in shock. Yuder calmly informed them of the possibility of exhaustion after using great or unfamiliar powers, then opened a small window at the top of the closed door.

Kishiar, who had been leaning against the door outside, smiled as their eyes met through the window.

“It seems you were successful.”

“Yes. Our permitted time is not long. Please, come in.”

To maintain the secrecy of the interrogation content, Lusan and Gloe agreed to step outside for a while, allowing Kishiar to enter. Kishiar, not forgetting to show appreciation, patted the backs of those passing by him, acknowledging their hard work.

“Well done. It was a challenging task, but thanks to your willing courage, we may resolve an issue that remained a puzzle.”

“No… Not at all!”

Gloe was profoundly flustered by the person, who previously had only hoped to be regarded as a large flower vase or an ignorable plant, now resembling a true Commander, extending a graceful greeting. Lusan, feeling he had not been of much help, waved his hands dismissively with a shy expression.

“I hardly said anything useful in aiding the interrogation. You flatter me.”

“Not at all. Priest Lusan, you have done more today than anyone could have.”

“Me…?”

“Indeed, your talent in the card game was exceptional. Without the Priest’s abilities, we might not have achieved such favorable results.”

“Is that… so? Ha ha.”

Lusan, still not quite understanding the significance of his actions, left with a face full of perplexity, disappearing beyond the door.

“Don’t inflate the Priest’s expectations too much. She might take it seriously.”

“And you, Assistant, even kindly recommended to other members to learn the card game?”

“How can my mere words weigh the same as the Commander’s praise?”

“What difference does it make? Coming from the most skilled member of the Cavalry. To me, that’s far more valuable.”

Yuder realized it was impossible to win this verbal spar. He then gestured towards Aton, who was still hanging his head low.

“We should proceed with the interrogation now. We don’t have much time left.”

“Indeed.”

Kishiar, wiping his light smile away, sat down beside Yuder. The gentle atmosphere around him suddenly turned into a cold silence.

“Now, Aton. You are a spy, acting here under the orders of the Wolf’s Eye tribe. Am I wrong?”

“How dare you… such impudence. I am Udaquan, a descendent of the Wolf’s Eye tribe. I was chosen, so the word ‘orders’ is not appropriate.”

Yuder felt a subtle irritation. Aton, cursed to speak only the truth, was still upholding his pride in his response. Unlike brainwashing, the curse allowed

him to answer truthfully while revealing his essence, leaving Yuder no choice but to clench and unclench his fist, containing his frustration.

‘I should have taught him some manners before cursing him.’

“So, being of the Wolf’s Eye tribe and a Udaquan, you took responsibility for this matter. Since the tribe and the Black Moon Faith had united, they required someone who belonged to both. Is that what you mean?”

Aton responded after a brief silence.

“Yes.”

“Why did the tribe and the faith, long unallied, decide to unite? When did this alliance first occur?”

“It started 17 years ago when the current chieftain ascended and declared to reclaim our glory. He sought out the First Udaquan, attempting an alliance and sent me among others as a symbol of trust. However, the formal alliance… happened 2 years ago.”

“Two years ago, coincidentally around the same time as the fall of the Red Stone.”

“…”

“What does ‘reclaiming our glory’ mean?”

“It refers to the era when the God we worship was widely revered. When we were the masters north of the desert… returning to that time.”

“So, the goal is to wage war to eliminate the Orr Empire?”

“…That is merely a step in the process. The empire is not the only entity north of the desert.”

It was an astonishing revelation. A chill akin to goosebumps ran down Yuder’s spine as he listened. However, Kishiar’s expression remained unaltered as he continued his questioning with a calm voice.

“Then it can be inferred that your reach extends beyond the empire to other states north of the desert. But was there a need to disrupt the ‘balance of the land’ in such a perilous manner to reclaim your supposed glory?”

This time, Aton remained silent for a longer period. Eventually, he slowly opened his mouth to respond.

“…I was not permitted to know the full truth of the matter. However, when the mission to disrupt the balance was handed down, the First Udaquan had said something.”

“What was that?”

“That the appearance of chosen ones like me signifies that our God has finally responded to our prayers, bestowing His will upon us… that we are merely altering the course of the world momentarily to bring divine punishment upon the usurpers, and that we should not doubt.”

“…What?”

Unable to wait for Kishiar’s next question, Yuder, unable to contain himself any longer, stepped forward and sharply interjected.

“So, you believe that the falling of the Red Stone and the emergence of the Awakener is the will of your God?”

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Chapter 912

“So, you believe that the falling of the Red Stone and the emergence of the Awakener is the will of your God?”

It was preposterous. Although little was known about the Red Stone, it was clear that such an idea was absurd.

Where did the Red Stone fall again? In the remote valleys of the Orr Empire, where Yuder resided. No one on the continent had foreseen such an event until just before it happened, and only after the Awakeners appeared in large numbers did they begin to understand its correlation.

If they insist that the emergence of the Red Stone and the Awakeners was due to the Black Moon, then they should have at least predicted the stone’s fall. The notion of it being a prophecy of a strange, new, and powerful force sent by their God. How convenient a story to elevate their own status across the continent?

But as far as Yuder knew, there were no significant movements in the southern countries around the time the Red Stone fell. Had they known beforehand, even if the stone had fallen in the empire, they would have quickly found a way to collect it before the empire showed interest, wouldn’t they?

Even if not, if the stone had fallen in their region or if Awakeners had appeared predominantly there, it might have been worth listening to their insistence.

‘I know it’s a typical trait of priests to relate everything to God, but to exploit the Red Stone and Awakeners in such a manner? Such audacity is almost on the level of the sage.’

“…Indeed.”

“Any proof?”

Aton remained silent for a long time.

‘Of course not.’

Yuder thought coldly, but surprisingly, after a moment, Aton offered an unexpected answer.

“The First Udaquan and the chieftain kept it a secret, but… my guess is, it’s related to ‘the Last Emperor’s Records.’”

“The Last Emperor’s Records?”

A new term emerged.

There are many countries and communities on the continent with various leaders. However, only the head of the Orr Empire could claim the title of Emperor across the continent. It had been so for a thousand years. To Yuder’s knowledge, the only one who broke this unspoken rule was Ejain, King of Nelarn, who had achieved even greater influence than the declining Orr Empire in his previous life.

‘But even he did not officially call himself an emperor; it was others who called him that.’

King Ejain of that time had a reputation strong enough to warrant another coronation as an emperor. Regardless of his true nature, he had almost perfectly protected his kingdom. He willingly accepted small countries seeking protection from Nelarn and eventually even subjugated Durban, a long-time rival state, making them a vassal. Everyone called Nelarn not a kingdom, but an empire. Even Yuder later thought so.

The reason King Ejain didn’t officially call himself an emperor was likely due to not wanting to unnecessarily provoke the wrath of Emperor Katchian amidst the chaotic world politics.

But in today’s world, there was no nation as powerful as Nelarn was back then. There were no nations in the southern lands either, only tribes or their temporary alliances. So, who was this ‘Last Emperor’?

At that moment, as Yuder furrowed his brows, Kishiar raised his hand, indicating he wished to speak. The man, whose thoughts were unreadable, looked down at Aton for a moment before asking in a low and cautious voice.

“Is that a record from before the Great Destruction?”

The Great Destruction, a time Yuder had not considered. As Yuder widened his eyes slightly, Aton nodded affirmatively.

“…Yes.”

“How many such records exist in your possession?”

“…I do not know. But even if there are more, none would be as significant as the Last Emperor’s Records. It is a true treasure, passed down in our tribe, accessible only to the chieftain and those he permits.”

“A treasure, indeed. So, you’re saying that your current actions are guided by these records?”

Aton remained silent. However, Kishiar, undeterred, quickly continued.

“The First Udaquan spoke of reclaiming past glory. Do you think the chieftain of the Wolf’s Eye tribe shares this objective?”

“In my view…”

“Yes, I’m curious about your thoughts.”

“…The cause is the same. However, I sometimes believe the chieftain’s ultimate goal differs.”

“How so?”

“The chieftain is… gathering the scattered Children of the Moon while sending people like me north of the desert. If his goal is achieved… we might finally break free from our long curse and unite under a true leader.”

“…”

“Perhaps… we might even… have a king…”

At that moment, a faint haze emanated from Aton’s body, signaling the nearing end of Gloe’s power.

“It seems we have reached the limit.”

“Indeed. That’s unfortunate.”

Yuder watched Aton warily, ready to act in case of any unforeseen circumstance.

Individuals like Aton, knowing many secrets, usually carry an oath that causes death or madness if they disclose ‘important information’. The first thing the Cavalry checked after capturing Aton was for signs of such an oath.

However, no trace of the oath was found on him. Although the oath is typically made in the Temple of the Sun God, and even the fakes created in back alleys have a similar essence, there was always uncertainty.

‘They might possess a power akin to it.’

In fact, this was why Gloe’s power was deemed even more necessary. Gloe’s ‘Card of Truth’ could penetrate the truth from someone, even with an oath, without triggering it, hence why it was considered one of the Cavalry’s best interrogation tools, despite its heavy drain on Gloe’s power.

If Aton harbored a power similar to the oath, and if Gloe’s power couldn’t penetrate it, this interrogation might be both the first and last opportunity.

After a tense moment, the fluctuating power above Aton’s body completely subsided. He collapsed, unconscious.

Simultaneously, Lusan, who was outside, knocked on the door.

“Sir Yuder! Miss Gloe has fainted!”

It seemed that Gloe, who had held on while Aton was conscious, ultimately succumbed to exhaustion the moment her power waned. Yuder immediately requested her to be transferred to the medical unit without delay. Nathan Zuckerman, who was likely at the entrance, would surely provide immediate assistance.

There was no report of a fever, which suggested that the aftereffects of using her abilities were not severe. However, the uncertainty of how long she would remain asleep was a minor issue. Yuder looked down at the collapsed Aton and exhaled deeply.

“Before the prisoner wakes up, there’s a possibility he might suddenly die, so it’s best to closely monitor his condition. If he wakes up safely, we can ascertain the extent to which Gloe’s ability was effective.”

“Yes, we should do that.”

They called the other members who had been waiting, concluded the interrogation, and made their way out. Reneve, looking utterly exhausted, approached with a pale face.

“I tried my best, as you wished. Did it… go well?”

“Your efforts were a great help, thank you.”

“That’s good to hear… really.”

Without Reneve’s ability, they wouldn’t have been able to conclude this entire ruse so successfully. Yuder expressed his gratitude, and Reneve was visibly delighted. She had always wanted to repay Yuder’s kindness and seemed to feel that she had finally been able to provide significant assistance.

Previously, it would have been difficult to ask Reneve for help, fearing that her overexertion in controlling her power would make it hard to manage the prison. But now, with an ample supply of Awakener power suppression devices created by Alik, Yuder felt more confident in asking. He advised the others to leave the rest to him and suggested Reneve take a rest for the day.

“Alright. I’ll leave for today then…”

After Reneve had left, Yuder exchanged nods with the other Cavalry members who came to take over and stepped onto the stairs leading upwards. It was only when he and Kishiar entered the empty office that they exchanged words again.

“But how did you know that the Last Emperor’s Records were from before the Great Destruction, just by hearing about it? Honestly, I thought it was just nonsense.”

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Chapter 913

“But how did you know that the Last Emperor’s Records were from before the Great Destruction, just by hearing about it? Honestly, I thought it was just nonsense.”

“It’s thanks to my diligent search for information from that era, including the insights from Archmage Luma and the First Duke Tain. Moreover, during your prolonged slumber, I had nothing else to do but to search even more earnestly. Anyone with my level of investigation would have easily guessed it.”

Kishiar answered with a smile that made it seem as if he had been living normally while Yuder was in a coma-like state.

‘During my coma, didn’t he say he spent most of his days asleep, only waking briefly to catch up on overdue work? And he investigated all this in such a short time?’

He then remembered the books that were always on the table beside Kishiar’s bed. Most were in an ancient language unknown to Yuder. He had seen Kishiar reading them only a few times, usually when he woke up before Yuder left for work. Now he realized that they were part of his research.

‘Incredible.’

This was not just living a day like others lived three; it was more like living an hour as others would a day. Kishiar, as if knowing Yuder’s thoughts, continued with a smile.

“As everyone knows, only a handful of records exist about the world before the great destruction, and we can only make guesses based on them. However, some things are relatively easy to infer. For instance, the foundations and systems established by the new nations formed after the destruction. Were all the rules that maintain our society, including the laws

of our Orr Empire, created from scratch at the time of its founding? Was our empire the first to name a ruler ‘Emperor’ and a nation ‘Empire’?”

Of course, Yuder had never pondered these things. He just blinked and listened, prompting Kishiar to explain further with a faint smile.

“I don’t think so. The records from around the founding of the Orr Empire, preserved in the imperial archives, show that much was borrowed from existing concepts when establishing the nation. Tales of ministers working tirelessly through the night to adopt good practices and reform bad customs for re-creation support this. Where did these ‘bad customs’ they sought to change come from? How did they know about them? The records suggest that neither ‘Empire’ nor ‘Emperor’ were terms invented at that time.”

According to Kishiar, when the first Emperor of the Orr Empire decided to name the country and himself, no one questioned the terms. They were already familiar to the people of that era and carried the same meanings as they do now.

“Whenever a new concept is introduced, there’s always resistance. Yet, the Orr Empire was readily recognized as an Empire with its ruler as the Emperor, not only by the surrounding allied kingdoms but by everyone left on the continent at that time. Some even left blessings at the First Emperor’s coronation, proclaiming, ‘Only he is truly the one to create a nation for the emperor that is genuinely for everyone.’”

A nation for the emperor that is genuinely for everyone. Yuder repeated the phrase, finding it slightly unfamiliar yet intriguing.

As he reflected on things he had never doubted before, suddenly they seemed to be turning upside down.

“So… if what the Commander says is true, then there must have been empires and emperors before the destruction that we know nothing about.”

“I believe so. Because that makes sense. Of course, we can’t know at all what kind of countries there were, since not even their names have survived.”

“Are there really no direct records of these nations before the great destruction in the imperial archives?”

“My guess is, in addition to the loss from the destruction, there might have been deliberate efforts to cover up and erase records of the old era. The founders of our time probably didn’t want to carry the burdens of the past into the new era they were starting.”

“…”

“But records aren’t just in writing, are they? Investigating legends and stories passed down through songs and tales from the early days of the empire, don’t you notice commonalities?”

He spoke of dragons, fairies, and other transcendent beings that lived and mingled with humans, and of flora and fauna now extinct.

“And, in addition, the existence of class and nations, injustices, and the full spectrum of human emotions were no different then.”

The man murmured lowly, observing Yuder’s expression as he continued to explain.

“Have you ever thought about where the ‘certain country of old’ frequently mentioned in ancient legends actually existed? What about the identities of those referred to merely as kings, nobles, priests, or knights?”

“I’ve never been curious about that, so I don’t know.”

“I think many of the songs and stories we naturally pass from mouth to mouth contain elements from before the destruction. Analyzing them shows that even in those fantastical times, the world was not so different from now.”

Even in an era where dragons, fairies, and spirits breathed life, humans formed nations; and in times when swordmasters cleaved the sky and priests revived the dead, the same unfair sorrows existed.

Kishiar’s eyes deepened.

“The structure of the ‘certain country of old’ that appears most in old tales closely resembles our current Orr Empire. An emperor at the center, and those of high status wielding power over their territories. Honestly, there are more stories of sorrow and injustice serving as warnings than there are of joy.”

“…”

“If that was the world before the great destruction, did the heroes who saved it from that era really want to pass on its ways to future generations? I think not.”

It wasn’t an incomprehensible feeling. Yuder, too, when recalling the declining days of the Orr Empire in his past life, did not want even a fragment of that time to seep into the present.

A world so corrupt, filled only with chaos, where erasing and starting anew seemed the better option. From the perspective of those who founded new nations, they might not have wanted to pass on the memories of the previous era.

“I understand that much. Then, what do you think about the records from the southern lands, said to be from the empire before the destruction?”

“The faith in the Black Moon, prevalent even at the beginning of the Empire’s founding, remained in the undercurrent of the continent before gradually disappearing, leaving only traces in the south. The southern people’s long-claimed ‘restoration of glory’ as a pretext for war has been one of the continuous threads since then.”

As he spoke, Kishiar unrolled a small map of the continent that had been kept rolled up on one side of his office desk. His long fingers tapped lightly on the area marked as ‘Southern Lands,’ below the desert.

“Do you remember what Aton called us earlier?”

“…He called us usurpers.”

Kishiar nodded in agreement.

“Yes. Their stance has always been the same. They believe they must reclaim the territories and influence that were originally theirs, taken by the northern countries beyond the desert. Of course, the Empire and the northern countries dismiss it as nonsense, but…”

Kishiar’s fingers paused, and he fell silent, lost in thought, before continuing.

“In truth, it’s not completely nonsensical. It seems that the ancestors of the people now living in what’s called the Southern Lands were driven there after the great destruction, forced to migrate from all over the continent.”

He shared his belief that the gradual disappearance of the faith in the Black Moon, now confined to the Southern Lands, supported this historical view.

“While it hasn’t been officially declared, the remnants are so clear that most in the historical community acknowledge it. However, if the so-called ‘The Last Emperor’s Records’ is indeed there… it makes me think we can add a new speculation.”

He looked at Yuder with a questioning gaze. Yuder slowly opened his mouth to respond.

“…It suggests the possibility that Aton’s tribe, or perhaps the entire Southern Lands, were deeply connected to the empire that existed before the destruction.”

“Right.”

The buried history of the past. Yet, descendants seeking to reclaim that past.

Yuder’s mind raced with thoughts, but in the end, he arrived at a singular conclusion.

“Anyway, if that’s their justification, their ultimate goal is quite clear.”

Was it really for such a trivial reason that the world's balance was disrupted, twisted to the point of irreparable calamity? At that thought, a feeling of suffocation suddenly overwhelmed him.

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Chapter 914

At that thought, a feeling of suffocation suddenly overwhelmed him.

His stomach tightened, and nausea welled up within him. It was another hand placed over Yuder's clenched one that blocked the cold sensation that couldn't be suppressed as usual.

"…"

"Since this conversation seems to be a long one, shall we sit together and talk?"

Yuder, without avoiding Kishiar's gaze, slowly moved as he was led. Kishiar sat down in front of a desk with a map of the continent spread out and pulled Yuder onto his lap, enveloping him in his embrace.

It was a posture that would shock anyone who saw it, but now it no longer mattered. Yuder, with his eyes cast down, naturally inhaled the cool fragrance spreading around him. The rhythmic heartbeat from the chest just beyond the face he leaned on was a sound that more than anything confirmed the man holding him so tightly was alive.

Until just now, he had felt nothing, but then he began to sense the tension that had been threatening to shatter him slowly relaxing.

…Had I been tensing my body this much?

While exhaling a thin breath and pondering this, a low voice reached his ears.

"We still don't know the exact cause of the Great Destruction that occurred a thousand years ago. Despite long research by countless scholars and priests, no answer satisfying everyone has been found."

It was common for Kishiar to abruptly change the topic during conversations. Therefore, Yuder simply remained silent, continuing to listen.

“Some say it was due to the wrath of the gods. Others believe in the emergence of a powerful monster unknown to us. But could such monumental and significant events be the sole causes of the destruction?”

“…”

“Including the Orr Empire, there have been countries that have firmly held their ground over the past thousand years. However, there are far more nations ambitiously founded only to silently fall apart. His Majesty, during his time as a prince, was particularly fond of reading histories of such nations. Eventually, he realized something. Do you have any guess as to what that might be?”

“No.”

Yuder’s response was stark, but Kishiar’s touch on his back remained tender as ever.

“It’s that the beginning is always beautiful, but the end is invariably filthy. No matter the grandeur of the ideals or the might of the force, at the moment of downfall, each fails to shed their greed, squabbling and exploiting those around, clinging to past glories, blind to the future. This has been the downfall of countless nations, or groups comparable to them.”

“…”

“Then, was the Great Destruction really any different? Having returned from witnessing the end of a previous game, what do you think?”

Yuder, revisiting the thoughts he had earlier, opened his lips.

“I think…”

Yuder Aile, who in a past life was convinced the world was racing towards its end, said,

“…as you say, the world hurtling towards its end was not at all pristine. Had there been even a slight goodness, I wouldn’t have strived so hard to avoid repeating those times in my second game.”

After speaking, Yuder began to sense a bit of what Kishiar might be trying to convey to him.

“Are you saying that the cause of downfall being dirty and predictable is to be expected?”

Kishiar replied quietly, “There’s no need to feel empty or enraged upon realizing the blatant intentions of those who seek their own glory, hiding behind the chaos they create in the world.”

“The feud between Durban and Nelarn is well-known, but few know that it originated over an apple pie at an alliance meeting 560 years ago. The King of Durban, suspecting that he was slighted with a pie with fewer apples, broke the alliance with the King of Nelarn. This was the beginning of the conflict, as he also sent away his wife, who was the beloved sister of the King of Nelarn.”

“…That’s absurd.”

Yuder expressed his frank astonishment. Kishiar of course explained that the apple pie incident was merely the last drop in an already full vessel, not the sole cause. It’s common for longstanding resentments to explode over trivial matters. Still, the fact that such a petty trigger ignited the fuse was indeed absurd.

Knowing how many have suffered as a result to this day, he could only sigh.

“Even the Diarca Duchy, now more than eager to seize the imperial family, was once counted among the most loyal vassals and allied noble families hundreds of years ago. They were the first to be officially permitted by the Emperor to maintain a private army of more than ten thousand, in recognition of their service. I wonder if the people back then could have foreseen that the spear given to protect the Emperor would eventually turn against the imperial family.”

Kishiar’s stories, complex yet strangely clear to the ear and mind, included cynicisms that seemed hard to believe coming from a member of the Orr Empire’s imperial family.

“I believe that if the brilliant ministers and politicians who laid the foundations in the early days of the empire hadn’t lived long to solidify its base, Orr would have fallen during the Tuelan Turmoil 700 years ago. The decision not to concentrate power in one place, allowing for quick recovery even when problems arose, was truly remarkable. The Empire’s luck and fortune were also in having exceptional individuals appear in times of crisis to mend its wounds, but now I wonder… Is it still the same? With talents like you and the Cavalry coming at the right time.”

After sharing such historical anecdotes, Kishiar lifted the corners of his lips in a smile devoid of warmth.

“Indeed. Conflicts start over such ridiculous reasons, continuing for centuries, causing suffering to many. That’s why knowing why these things happen is important. To avoid repeating the same mistakes, we must understand the causes.”

No matter how absurd or pathetic the truth uncovered, what’s known is known. His red eyes seemed to convey that message.

“If you hadn’t spent so much effort in the previous game, we wouldn’t have been able to uncover the petty intentions of those stale figures through Aton today.”

“…”

“So don’t think that your efforts are diminished or meaningless just because of such a trivial reason. Remember, there are many more ridiculous and laughable things in the world.”

Yuder remained silent for a long time, then finally nodded slightly.

“…Indeed, that seems true.”

“Doesn’t it?”

All the things that had seemed overwhelming and hollow moments ago suddenly began to feel a bit ludicrous. Yuder bit the inside of his lip and then released it, exhaling a sigh.

In the gaze that met his, the deep turmoil inside his own dark eyes faintly appeared.

“If I said I didn’t feel a sense of emptiness at being so manipulated and played by those engrossed in such petty thoughts, it would be a lie.”

“…”

“Yet, as Commander… as you say, I’m relieved to know now. It’s much clearer who we’re dealing with compared to other causes I couldn’t even fathom, and it seems easier to think of ways to counter them in the future.”

He hesitated for a moment, habitually addressing him as ‘Commander’ before slightly altering the term of address. Kishiar’s eyes widened slightly, then he tightened his embrace around Yuder.

“The ambitions of those people are clear, regardless, and the strength and time they have prepared to fulfill their desires are certainly not to be underestimated. It will be incredibly difficult to mitigate the damage already wrought in the south.”

Moreover, revealing their objectives and forming alliances with other nations would be a daunting task. It was still unclear to what extent they intended to replicate, or had already replicated, the chaos they caused in the south elsewhere.

Yuder, resting his forehead lightly against Kishiar’s shoulder, continued.

“…Yet, you are here, aren’t you.”

“…”

“That to me is more meaningful than anything else….”

Yuder wanted to say it would remain so in the future, but he couldn’t finish. Kishiar overlapped his lips over his lips before he could complete his thought.

“Ah…”

A pained exclamation rang out, intermingled with the hurriedly deepening kiss. At the same time, a surge of uncontrollable emotions from Kishiar engulfed him from head to toe.

To savor these emotions, Yuder closed his eyes.

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Chapter 915

To savor these emotions, Yuder closed his eyes.

In the past, he had found it painful when feelings surged in all at once. It was akin to forcing down too much food at once, naturally leading to the sensation of choking. Even now, the overwhelmingness persisted, the sensations of jumbled, tightly packed masses indiscriminately burrowing into him causing his heart to ache and breath to catch.

Yet, he could now bear this overwhelmingness.

No, it was more than bearable-it was almost pleasurable.

Could there be anything more certain than the fact that the existence of Yuder Aile could shake that man to this extent?

While his tongue tangled, Kishiar continued to emit low groans, as if about to speak. Heat surged at every point of contact. After mindlessly absorbing and accepting this heat for some time, Yuder found himself almost toppling over, his back nearly touching the desk.

It was then that Yuder opened his eyes again. Dizzy with the plethora of emotions he had taken in, he blinked slowly, breathing thinly like a sated beast, as Kishiar's wet lips curved into a smile.

Finally, Kishiar parted his lips slightly, whispering so only Yuder could hear.

"I feel the same."

"…"

"Even though I think I know what I must strive for, there are times when I feel utterly unsure. Especially when I see humans who, despite countless warnings from the past, persist in their greed and repeat the same mistakes.

I’ve sometimes thought that perhaps I’m no different, and everything seems meaningless.”

Yet, despite this.

Murmuring so, Kishiar’s forehead gently bumped and stuck to Yuder’s. Their lashes almost touching, Yuder could see the deep, red eyes.

“The fact that you, who surely knows this better than I, are here with me, walking this path, holds an unmistakable significance to me.”

“…”

“It’s something that can’t be explained to anyone or anything else… except you.”

Forever, onwards.

The last word was again buried between their merged lips, but strangely, Yuder heard it clearly.

Beyond the elongated shadow merged into one, the drizzle continued. Yuder suddenly recalled drawing a card during Gloe’s ability test the day before, predicting minor misfortune due to water. If Kishiar hadn’t dismissed it, perhaps it would have related to this rain.

However, for Yuder, nothing had happened. The gamble-like challenge he’d taken, trusting in Gloe’s ability, had succeeded, and even at this moment, everything he had prepared was falling into place without issue.

Enveloped in Kishiar’s embrace, even the cold brought by the rain went unfelt. The chill and pain that used to pierce his heart were now but faint traces.

Yuder turned his gaze from the rain streaming down the window and once again surrendered himself to a kiss that felt like sharing breaths underwater.

Two scents, silently released, intertwined for a long time.

-

“Yuder, you’ve truly recovered well. I was worried while you were away, but it’s truly fortunate.”

Having not seen each other for a while, Kanna arrived with Pruelle, who held a kitten-like Nipollen. Yuder exchanged a glance and a silent greeting with Pruelle and Kanna, following a small cry from Nipollen. He quietly observed the faces of the three.

Embarking on a mission to the desert was never an easy task. The climate was vastly different from here, and many returned with strange illnesses for unknown reasons. Frequent monster appearances made it a perilous place, one even seasoned mercenaries, who made their living undertaking such dangerous tasks, often preferred to avoid.

The mere fact that they had managed to gather information successfully while directly interacting with the Southerners, who might not have spoken their language, was enough to earn them considerable praise.

Yuder’s mind was finally at ease only after confirming that all three appeared healthy.

‘Well, Nathan Zuckerman did indeed attach to them, so I expected as much…’

“I’m glad to see you’re well too.”

Kanna smiled brightly in response to Yuder, who kept his recent thoughts to himself.

“Well, we… didn’t really fight anyone. We just gathered some information and came back. So, where is the Commander now?”

“He stepped out for a bit due to some other matters. He’ll be back soon.”

“Ah, I see.”

Kanna murmured, scratching her head, realizing she had chosen an inopportune time to report. She glanced at Yuder briefly before lowering her voice and asking cautiously.

“Um, I guess Sir Zuckerman must have reported yesterday, so Yuder, you know… where we went, right?”

“…I know. I’ve heard the results.”

Yesterday, Kishiar had relayed Nathan Zuckerman’s report to Yuder.

Nathan Zuckerman, Kanna, Pruelle, and Nipollen, who had set off to the desert in search of information about Nahan, had diligently investigated the Owl Wings Trading Company, believed to be related to Nahan’s fall in one of the midlands.

Nipollen sensed several traces of the Awakeners in that desolate midland, while Pruelle, utilizing his shape-shifting abilities, blended into the surrounding midlands to eavesdrop on rumors known only to Southerners. Kanna read as much information as possible from the objects and locations brought back by Pruelle and Nathan Zuckerman.

The conclusion was that the Owl Wings Trading Company’s withdrawal from the midland was undoubtedly related to Nahan’s fall there.

Rumors were circulating among the Southerners who used the midland about an incident in the family that owned the Owl Wings Trading Company.

‘The rumor was that the current owner had found a long-lost nephew.’

The current owner of the Owl Wings, a well-known single woman, had a sister who was originally meant to inherit the company. However, she passed away over twenty years ago.

There were whispers among the Southerners about the deceased former owner having an unauthorized child with a noble from the Empire she met

for business. While no one knew the exact truth, if the current owner indeed had a ‘long-lost nephew’, the only plausible guess was that child.

After the former owner’s death, the rumor, which had long been dormant, resurfaced quietly with the nephew’s return, causing various opinions among the Southerners using the midland.

It seemed evident that this ‘lost nephew’ was likely Nahan.

The group delved into how he could have survived and been picked up by the trading company. It was a potentially dangerous endeavor, but fortunately, a Southerner trading company, entangled with them by an unexpected turn of fate, lent assistance.

This company belonged to a minority tribe in the South, struggling with an issue arising in the desert. Thanks to Pruelle’s shape-shifting ability, Kanna’s information-gathering skills, and Nathan Zuckerman’s swordsmanship, they resolved the issue and, in gratitude, were treated lavishly for several days.

It turned out that they had a minor connection with the Shuden Trading Company of Mick Shuden, which significantly influenced their mutual trust.

While receiving help from this Southern company, the group had to stay in the desert longer than anticipated. However, this enabled them to gather much more information than they would have managed alone. The Southern company, with a deep history and wide-reaching connections, knew many stories circulating in the shadows across the South.

According to one such story, the tribe that owned the Owl Wings Trading Company had renowned ‘healers.’ These individuals, who suddenly came into possession of extraordinary healing powers two years prior, became covertly famous for rumors that they could save anyone as long as they were still breathing.

Although the truth of these healers’ abilities was uncertain, the group was convinced that they were Awakeners and had undoubtedly been the ones

who saved Nahan.

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Chapter 916

Although the truth of these healers' abilities was uncertain, the group was convinced that they were Awakeners and had undoubtedly been the ones who saved Nahan.

'However, there wasn't enough time to inquire further about those healers.'

Had the Cavalry been in a more relaxed situation, they might have considered staying longer, or even selecting some of their own to exchange places and send to the Southern lands. However, neither option was feasible at the moment, so returning after gathering only that much information was the best they could do. The party concluded their mission after establishing a way to communicate with the Southern merchants they had met.

This was the extent of Nathan Zuckerman's report on overseeing the mission. Now, Kanna and Pruelle were here to provide a more detailed account from their own perspectives.

Yuder decided it was better to sit and chat while waiting for Kishiar, rather than standing.

"Please, take a seat."

He offered them water, but both Kanna and Pruelle shook their heads in refusal.

"What about Nipollen? I think there's some milk."

"No need. Nipollen just ate… Oh, Nipollen!"

As if recognizing its name, the cat suddenly leaped from its brother's arms and approached Yuder. Yuder gazed expressionlessly at the small head that nuzzled against his ankle.

"I told you to stay put because everyone's busy here. Come here quickly."

“It’s okay, let him roam as he pleases.”

At Yuder’s interjection, Pruelle, who was hastily trying to restrain his brother, sat down with an awkward smile.

“Thank you. After our trip to the desert, Nipollen has become more active than before. He still doesn’t often return to his human form, but… I take it as a good sign.”

“We were incredibly lucky. The tribe we were connected with through the merchants revered cats as sacred animals. It was fortunate for us on the mission, but especially for Nipollen, it seemed to be a very positive experience.”

Kanna interjected with a smile. This was a detail that had not been mentioned in Nathan Zuckerman’s report.

“Cats?”

“Yes. Despite our group appearing somewhat suspicious, they readily agreed to help us, largely thanks to Nipollen. I was worried Nipollen might be sad to leave, given how friendly he had become with the cats raised by that merchant group.”

Luckily, Nipollen didn’t seem to mind too much. The cat, after circling Yuder’s ankles repeatedly, suddenly jumped up and cautiously settled on his lap. Pruelle was startled again, but Yuder merely glanced and didn’t seem to mind.

“By the way, what was the name of that merchant group?”

“Donabi Manaik. It means ‘Tabby Whiskers.’ The tribe’s name is Nabi Manaik, which would be ‘Cat Whiskers Tribe’ in the imperial language.”

Of course, these were names Yuder had never heard in his previous life. They seemed to be a rather small tribe.

“And what about their connection with the Shuden Trading Company? What was that about?”

“Oh, that. I didn’t hear it from them; I found out through my abilities. It’s a bit long to explain… But I was planning to inform the Commander anyway.”

According to Kanna’s story, the Tabby Whiskers merchant group primarily dealt in the trade of monster by-products through maritime routes. By chance, they happened to establish a trading connection with the Shuden Trading Company in in a country to the north. Since the Shuden group also specialized in trading rare goods made from monster by-products, this connection was not surprising.

Naturally, merchant groups sharing the same trading partners would inevitably learn various things about each other. The Shuden group, eyeing an opportunity to expand into the Southern lands, judged the Tabby Whiskers group to be a potentially valuable ally.

“So, Mick Shuden himself went there to meet them. It seems they were a great help when he decided to expand into the Southern lands. I was able to access this information because of that.”

The fact that Mick Shuden, an Awakener who could see the true nature of people, had personally met with them and decided to continue business indicated that the people of the Tabby Whiskers group were deemed trustworthy.

‘Shuden group was almost uniquely known for establishing a branch in the Southern lands… So that’s how it was connected. Thinking about it, it would have been difficult to set up a branch in the south without local help.’

In fact, Yuder had been aware of this information since the time he first met Revlin Shand Apeto, when he saw Kishiar comfortably using the Shuden group’s identity badge. He had simply thought of it as the group’s shrewd business acumen, not expecting it to intertwine and become helpful in such a situation.

“If that’s the case, it might be a good idea to reach out to the Shuden group. If we can maintain a long-term cooperation with the Tabby Whiskers group, it would be beneficial for us too.”

“Right? I was planning to suggest the same to the Commander. From what I observed while there, the tribe’s attitude towards people from north of the desert was quite positive. Frankly, we haven’t been treated that well by anyone we met in the South. Probably the encounter with the Shuden group brought significant changes to them.”

The Cavalry would continue to gather information about Nahan and the Southern lands, but the quality of information accessible to the locals was naturally higher. This was even more the case in a closed-off area with independent tribes, like the South.

‘According to Aton, while the Wolf’s Eye tribe is preparing to stir up the north of the desert, they are also attempting to unite the other Southern tribes.’

He had thought that their momentum was so formidable that they might have almost completed the unification internally. But listening to Kanna, it seemed the situation was not so straightforward, with the tribes not yet completely unified.

‘That’s fortunate from our perspective.’

Just discovering this made the mission a success of incomparable value.

‘…The Wolf’s Eye tribe. The Owl Wings merchant group. And the Cat Whiskers tribe. These three are what we need to focus on going forward. And perhaps the Black Moon Faith as well.’

A cold smile appeared on Yuder’s lips as he organized his thoughts.

“You’ve done a lot, Kanna.”

“Uh, yeah. Thanks for saying that… But was there something… unusual in the information I provided? You seem overly pleased…”

“…That’s a pleased expression?”

Listening quietly until now, Pruelle asked with a look of disbelief.

“Elle, you still can’t read Yuder’s expressions, can you? The fact that he smiles like that means he’s in a very good mood, so remember that. The only time Yuder has smiled like that was the night before he introduced a particularly intense training menu, an event that is still talked about to this day. The next day, we all went through hell…”

Kanna whispered with a warmth in her eyes that seemed both full and empty. A tension appeared on Pruelle’s face. Yuder was a bit taken aback but decided not to say anything.

He immediately remembered what training Kanna was talking about.

‘It was the full training we did before heading south.’

At that time, fewer than ten people managed to complete it within the time limit. Of course, the first person to complete it was Yuder Aile himself, who had devised the training.

The reason his mood was quite good the day before the training started was because, in less than a year since its creation, all 330 members had improved enough to attempt the training, realizing the significant improvement in their skills.

‘This training was also done in my previous life, but back then, it was designed to be completed around the third year…’

This meant that the current members were improving at a speed three times faster than in his previous life, and their strong will to undertake the training was equally strong. No matter how good the training menu Yuder prepared, if the participants were not willing to attempt it, the training could not be conducted.

From Yuder’s perspective, even seeing some members fall behind was meaningful enough to warrant the challenge, but it seemed the members had interpreted it somewhat differently.

“So… I see. I’m looking forward to the training we’ll be doing going forward…”

Pruelle swallowed nervously and smiled. At that moment, Yuder felt a strange sensation and turned his gaze to look at his face.

“Elle.”

“Hm?”

“You seem to have a fever.”

“Ah… Caught? I’ve had a slight fever since I returned yesterday. Probably because of the fatigue accumulated from the desert trip, so I took medicine right away to bring down the fever, and it’s not affecting my daily life, so I was just going to rest.”

“No. Just go back now.”

“…Why?”

Yuder closely examined the face of the young man with relaxed, red hair. Although he seemed not to notice it himself, Yuder’s intuition was certain.

Right now…

“That’s not just a slight fever. It looks like your second gender manifestation is about to start, so you should head back.”

“…Second gender manifestation? Me?”

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Chapter 917

“…Second gender manifestation? Me?”

Pruelle touched his face in disbelief. Kanna was just as surprised.

“Is it true? I had no idea…”

“It’s only natural you didn’t know. Your second gender has not manifested, after all.”

Kanna, despite her proficiency in gathering information, couldn’t have known something even Pruelle himself was unaware of. If there had been even one person with manifested second gender among those who went to the desert, they might have realized it sooner. However, Nathan Zuckerman wasn’t an Awakener at all, and both Kanna and Nipollen have not manifested their second gender, so they were not privy to this.

Yuder, too, had been unable to sense Jimmy’s second gender manifestation even when it was right in front of him during his non-manifested days. But now, it was different. The energy, still faint but increasingly strong, emanating from Pruelle was unmistakably a sign of an impending second gender manifestation.

‘And perhaps… almost certainly, he’ll be an Omega Awakener.’

The sensation emanating from Pruelle bore a fundamental similarity to the aura Yuder possessed. Had he been an Alpha Awakener, the feeling would have been different.

“Get up. I’ll take you back to the lodging. As soon as we return, you need to lie down. As for what to do during a second gender manifestation…”

“I know. I’ve been briefed by the Cavalry… Avoid contact with other members except the medical team, and stay put until the manifestation is complete.”

Pruelle calmly recited the instructions he had previously heard. It was natural for those who learned of their second gender manifestation to be startled and tense, but Pruelle, having experienced much and come this far, quickly regained his composure.

“Wait. But… what about Nipollen? He’ll be anxious if I don’t let him into the room while I’m there.”

Pruelle, hastily getting up, hesitated to extend his hand towards Nipollen, who was sitting on Yuder’s knee. Nipollen’s eyes widened, and he whimpered softly.

“Don’t worry. Kanna and I will take care of him.”

“Right. Nipollen will understand once we explain! So, don’t worry too much and go rest.”

“I’m causing trouble again… I’m sorry.”

“It’s not trouble. It’s just fellow members helping each other out. Didn’t we agree not to talk like that?”

Before Yuder could respond, Kanna interjected with a timely remark.

“Is that so… Yes, that’s right. Then, I’ll say thank you.”

Pruelle smiled weakly and then bowed to stroke his brother’s fur.

“Nippy. You must have heard, but I won’t be able to see you for a while. Listen to the others… don’t skip meals, and we’ll see each other later.”

“…”

Yuder handed Nipollen to Kanna and helped Pruelle stand up. He initially insisted he didn’t need support, but after staggering from dizziness on the way to the lodging, he obediently followed his guidance.

“Ah? It’s Yuder.”

As they nearly reached the lodging, they encountered a group of Cavalry members. Yuder noticed among them who had their second gender manifested, Gakane and Ever, and he reached out his hand.

“Don’t come any closer.”

“…What?”

“Yuder? Elle? What’s happening?”

Gakane and Ever stopped in their tracks, taken aback.

“I think a second gender manifestation is starting, so we’re moving him. Please don’t come closer and keep your distance.”

“What?”

“If you could also block off the area, that would be even better.”

Realizing they needed to avoid contact with someone undergoing a second gender manifestation, they quickly stepped back. In the meantime, Yuder managed to get Pruelle into the lodging and onto the bed in a swift, efficient manner.

Relying on Yuder’s hand, Pruelle, having shed his outerwear and shoes, collapsed onto the bed, gasping for breath and covering his eyes with a flushed face.

“…To encounter others at such a moment… I can’t understand why this feels so embarrassingly awkward. Is a second gender manifestation always like this?”

“There’s no need to think that way. I, along with others who had their second gender manifested, have all been through it, and no one thinks it’s strange.”

“Is that so… After all, recognizing and responding quickly like this is the best for everyone. It must not have been easy to think of setting up such a

system from the beginning… The Cavalry Commander is truly remarkable…”

Pruelle weakly smiled, then suddenly winced and curled up. Cold sweat beaded on his forehead, and his face turned pale. The unfinished scent and energy mixed and seeped out as he gritted his teeth, breathing in short gasps. The pain seemed intense, even though he was doing his best to endure it.

‘It’s just the beginning, and it’s already this severe… This is worse than with other Awakeners.’

In the past, the only option would have been to take sleeping pills and wait out the manifestation. However, currently, at the southern branch, there was someone very useful for this situation.

“Alik. Do you have the medicine for a second gender manifestation?”

“What? All of a sudden? I do have some spare…”

Alik, who was deeply engrossed in his research, pulled out a small medicine bottle from his pocket with a bewildered look. It was a trial version of an innovative medicine created by Master Thais Yulman for his disciple, who had turned into an Omega Awakener.

“There’s an Awakener starting a second gender manifestation right now, and he’s feeling a lot of pain. Is it okay to use this?”

“Ah… then, not this one, but you should use this instead.”

Alik, slightly embarrassed, took out another medicine.

“This is what I had left over when Master was improving the medicine. It’s better for an Awakener in the midst of manifestation. It reduces pain effectively, but it hardly suppresses the scent. It’s useless for me now, but for someone in the midst of manifestation…”

Alik explained that using a medicine that overly suppresses the scent during manifestation might cause issues with the process. Yuder agreed with his

reasoning and took the medicine.

The medicine, passed through the hands of Enon and Lusan, was given to Pruelle. As Alik said, it didn’t affect the emerging scent much but greatly alleviated the pain.

“He’s properly asleep now. There’s enough left, so it should last until the end.”

Enon, closing the door behind him, reported the situation with an indifferent face. Yuder nodded, exhaling softly.

“Let me know immediately if there’s any problem.”

“Take care of your own body. You do realize that your condition could be ten times more dangerous than Pruelle’s, right? Eh?”

Enon, somewhere between concern and threat, scrutinized Yuder from head to toe and clicked his tongue.

“Still, you’ve been sticking close to your Commander, I see.”

“Why. Has the soul’s state improved?”

“…Aren’t you leaving?”

Enon, after a moment of silence, smacked Yuder’s back hard, pushing him away.

“You said you were busy, didn’t you? Get lost, quickly. If you stay here, the Commander might come too. I don’t want to see that, so go. Go and eat something! You barely had breakfast today, right! I heard it all!”

The shouts instructing Yuder to go eat echoed resoundingly through the hallways. With such volume, it seemed likely that everyone inside the branch, despite the controlled access, would now be aware of whether Yuder Aile had eaten breakfast or not.

Yuder, nearly allowing a faint smile to escape, swallowed it and responded affirmatively.

‘If I say Enon now seems almost endearing, he would probably hate that.’

“Yuder!”

“Is Elle alright now?”

As he exited Pruelle’s room, where access was restricted, and turned into the corridor, Gakane and Ever approached with worried expressions.

“He’s fine. He’s taken medicine and fallen asleep; now, we just need his manifestation to complete safely.”

“That’s a relief… To have a manifestation suddenly after returning from a mission, he must have been startled.”

Ever sighed. Gakane, too, opened his mouth with a relieved expression.

“I didn’t even realize Elle was undergoing manifestation until you told us to stay back. It’s really fortunate that the manifestation began while you were with him.”

“…You didn’t know?”

Yuder thought the energy emanating from someone starting a second gender manifestation would be distinct enough for anyone to notice, though not always. But Pruelle’s was not so faint, he believed. It seemed strange that both Ever and Gakane, being Alpha Awakeners and thus more sensitive to the scent of Omega Awakeners, didn’t notice at all.

‘Could it be that my increased power has influenced my ability to detect such things?’

As Yuder looked down at his palm, pondering this, Gakane and Ever continued their conversation.

“Elle seems to have a very weak second gender aura. Among all who have undergone second gender manifestation I’ve seen, he is the first whose scent is so faint.”

“Right. I didn’t notice it either. How did you detect it so quickly?”

“Ever. Isn’t that question a bit pointless? We’re talking about Yuder. His scent concealment is so perfect it’s practically imperceptible, so that would have been easy for him.”

“Oh, right. Does his ability to conceal scents affect detection too?”

“…Wait a minute.”

Yuder raised his head. Something he had just overheard suddenly struck him as odd.

“My scent concealment, what about it?”

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Chapter 918

“My scent concealment, what about it?”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

Gakane blinked in surprise and cocked his head in response to Yuder’s question.

“Didn’t you say that my scent is barely perceivable at all?”

“Uh… is that some kind of strange remark…?”

It was indeed a strange remark. Yuder had never consciously tried to exert his scent so strongly that it would be noticeable.

‘Of course, I never intended to expose my scent carelessly.’

In his previous life, Yudrain Aile was famously known as an Omega without scent. He did not experience heat, and although he could detect the scents of others to some extent, he was never influenced by them.

However, this did not mean that Yuder was completely unaware of his own scent. He had never mentioned it to others, but he did possess a faint scent that he could move, albeit slightly. He had simply lived without trying to consciously manipulate or alter it.

‘I thought fixing it would be pointless because I would have to experience heat again.’

Among Awakeners with second genders, scent is instinctively considered the most secretive means of expression. It made sense, as only those with second genders could feel it.

Therefore, most of the Awakeners with second gender, except for those who were still new and struggling with control, did not bother to expose their

scent in daily life and kept it gathered. There was no need to reveal their scent in front of an unspecified majority except during the uncontrollable intense phases of heat.

But being human, it was impossible to perfectly control every physical phenomenon at all times. No matter how well one gathered their scent, there were times when it would slightly leak out without their awareness due to sudden changes in the body and emotions.

Moments of anger or surprise, during intensely difficult training, or when seriously injured. And many other unpredictable small moments depending on a person's nature and abilities.

Therefore, in a space where a group like a Cavalry lived together, it was not difficult to know those with second genders and what kind of scent they possessed, even if they didn't want to know.

After re-manifestation as an Omega in this life, Yuder's scent was not much different from others. His manifestation period was significantly shorter than others, and he went through heat right after manifestation, but that wasn't considered exceptionally strange.

Even though it was a bit difficult to control the strong scent right after manifestation, he soon got used to it and lived well, gathering it without much trouble. Perhaps due to his extensive experience observing other Awakeners with second genders in his previous life, handling his scent intentionally felt surprisingly easy.

However, easily controlling it did not mean he locked his scent away to the extent that others couldn't perceive it at all.

'Why would I do that? It's almost like blocking every hole in my body.'

While it wasn't impossible to do so using his abilities, blocking even the naturally occurring scent would make him like a person with every pore sealed.

Even before coming to the South, he didn’t feel any different from other Awakeners with second gender during his sudden heat. Kishiar had not mentioned anything either. If there had been something wrong with Yuder’s body, he would have been the first to notice and speak up. The fact that he didn’t say anything meant that he was probably unaware of the situation as well.

The more he thought about it, the more Yuder realized he needed to delve deeper into these perplexing words.

‘I suppose it’ll be alright if I return a bit late. Kanna will report any incidents that occur in my absence.’

After estimating the time, Yuder nodded to the two people with him.

“I’ve always thought that the way I gather my scent wasn’t significantly different from others. It seems necessary to hear more about this. Would it be alright if we talk for a while over there?”

Gakane and Ever looked at each other and then nodded in agreement.

“…Hmm, alright.”

“Sure.”

After entering a secluded space, Yuder closed the door and began speaking.

“When did you start feeling that my scent was being perfectly gathered?”

“When exactly…? At the beginning of your second gender manifestation, it wasn’t as it is now, but I thought you were increasingly hiding it well… Ah, but after coming to the South recently, I felt a significant difference.”

“I agree with Gakane. As time passed, I felt that your scent was gradually fading, so I thought Yuder was paying great attention to gathering it. Today, while with Elle, it felt almost indistinguishable from an unmanifested person.”

‘…’

Summarizing their conversation, Yuder's two closest companions, both Alpha Awakeners, had consistently felt his scent diminishing. In the capital, in the West, and finally in the South, they admired his increasing ability to gather his scent, not finding it odd.

"I naturally thought that you, Yuder, were capable of doing that much, so I didn't find it strange."

"Me too. That's why recently, I've been practicing to gather my scent more perfectly."

"Really? So that's why I hardly noticed any scent during training lately! You're amazing, Ever."

"Thank you for saying that. Do you want to train together, Gakane?"

"Really? That would be great!"

While the two Alpha Awakeners warmly exchanged words, Yuder coldly pondered.

'That can't be right.'

Just yesterday, he had released his scent while with Kishiar. Kishiar seemed to perceive and feel Yuder's scent normally. His attitude and reaction were certainly not false.

However, if other Awakeners couldn't feel his scent to this extent, it might mean that his scent was gradually disappearing. Yuder was engulfed in a complex mix of emotions.

He knew that even if he left things as they were and reverted to an unexplained scentless Omega like in his previous life, it would not hinder his life. Yet, recalling Kishiar's face, he could not view it with the same detachment as before.

The sensation of the scent he deeply felt for a long time yesterday was still so vivid in his mind that the thought of never experiencing it again was unbearable.

“…”

“Sorry, but would it be alright if I release my scent a bit? I want to see if it’s still imperceptible even if I do it intentionally.”

Yuder’s voice was surprisingly calm as he made the request. He mentioned that if either of them was close to their heat cycle, they needn’t force themselves, but fortunately, both Gakane and Ever readily agreed.

“I don’t mind. What about you, Ever?”

“I’m fine with it too.”

Yuder took a deep breath, facing the two pairs of eyes watching him, and released the scent he had previously gathered. It was the first time he had allowed his scent to unfurl in front of others, apart from Kishiar.

He had released it quite a bit, yet the two, showing no change in expression initially, only reacted with a start when Yuder felt that even non-Awakeners could sense this to some extent through their sense of smell.

“Now I can feel it. This is Yuder’s scent. It’s quite intriguing, as it’s been a very long time.”

“Yeah, I think I can feel it too.”

Yuder stopped the release of his scent and gathered it back.

‘…What could it be?’

His scent hadn’t disappeared. Could there be an issue with Gakane and Ever’s ability to detect scents?

Not all Awakeners with second genders were equally adept at detecting others’ scents or at gathering their own. Some were so insensitive that they hardly felt others’ scents unless at the level of a heat cycle, while others, despite trying to gather, were clumsy at control and ended up inadvertently releasing their scent.

However, those who were weak at scent detection and gathering usually also possessed less potent or poorly controlled Awakener powers. Since only Awakeners can have second genders, it was not unusual for their power-handling skills to be linked to their ability to detect and control scents.

But Gakane and Ever were among the most capable in the Cavalry, and Ever, in particular, was known for her even finer control than Yuder. According to this logic, they should not be facing issues related to scents.

‘It seems that my scent is not entirely undetectable… Both of them seem unaware of the reason, and I can’t figure it out either, so there’s nothing more to learn here.’

That left only one course of action.

He had to find Kishiar and talk to him about it.

Yuder thanked the two for their help and left the place.

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Chapter 919

“Yuder!”

As Yuder returned to the office of the Commander, the first to greet him was Kanna. While locking gazes with Kishiar, who sat behind, and Nathan Zuckerman, who guarded the rear, Yuder had a brief conversation with Kanna.

“I was worried something had gone wrong since you returned late. Is everything resolved now?”

“Yes.”

Upon learning that Pruelle was now safely isolated and asleep, relief swept over Kanna’s face.

“That’s a relief.”

As Yuder had anticipated, it seemed she had finished reporting first after explaining the situation once Kishiar returned.

“There wasn’t any particular problem, so I should be heading back now. I’ll take care of Nipollen tonight. See you later! Commander, I’ll take my leave now.”

“Like I said earlier, don’t work anymore today and go rest immediately. Take good care of Nipollen who might feel uneasy due to his brother’s absence.”

“Understood. Nipollen will be happy since my room is right next to Deputy Commander Ever’s. Don’t worry.”

Kanna, while maintaining the formal titles required in an official setting, spoke with her usual bright tone. It was clear that she had shed much of the

weight from the troubles caused by Hosanna. Perhaps her recent desert trip had helped in that regard. It was uncertain, but thankfully so.

Yuder slightly crinkled his nose in an unseen greeting, then watched Kanna, holding Nipollen, as she left. Once the door closed and her small footsteps faded, Kishiar finally spoke in a more relaxed tone.

“Did you bring Elle the medicine Thais Yulman made?”

Indeed, it was just like Kishiar to guess precisely how Yuder would act in any situation.

“Yes.”

“I heard that the medicine is more helpful for those who are newly manifested or are experiencing severe heat period. I wasn’t sure how it would work on those who have just started manifesting. How did it go?”

“Alik mentioned exactly that. Among the new medicines developed during improvement, there was a suitable one, so I recommended it and gave it to him.”

“Good. If it’s effective, we should consider producing it specifically for those in the midst of manifestation.”

“I think so too.”

Thais Yulman, who had put aside his recent research to focus on mass-producing medicine, would have shouted for them to stop adding to his work if he heard this. But he wasn’t here, and Kishiar, unopposed by anyone, quickly scribbled an additional letter to send to Yulman.

“Nathan. Take this and send it.”

“Understood.”

Nathan Zuckerman, who had been standing quietly, took Kishiar’s letter and left. Now only two of them remained.

Yuder mulled over how to share the astonishing news he had just learned. However, he didn't need to ponder for long, as Kishiar casually broke the silence.

"So, apart from fetching the medicine, what else took up your time?"

Yuder's eyes twitched momentarily in response.

"Did you follow me, by any chance?"

"Hardly. I simply estimated based on the speed at which you move and how you prioritize your tasks. Even considering everything else, there seemed to be quite a bit of spare time."

"…"

"Hmm. Let's just say it's a combination of affection and observational skills."

The man winked playfully, closing one eye. Such a frivolous and carefree demeanor, yet seeing it, Yuder felt his inner tension ease. Perhaps he was truly mad by now.

Yuder let out a long sigh, then opened and closed his eyes.

"Indeed, as you say. I was delayed because I had an unexpected conversation on my way back."

"I'm curious. What happened? Was it a matter of state?"

"No."

"Then perhaps we should talk over tea. You look a bit pale."

Kishiar motioned for Yuder to sit first, then moved to a small table in the back to prepare tea. Anyone else would have been surprised to see someone of his stature making tea, but Yuder had grown accustomed to it. He had seen him fetch fish and fruits for their meals in a humble shack; what could be more surprising than that? Yuder silently released a bit of his scent,

observing the man, who could easily be mistaken for a seasoned tea master after decades in the imperial palace.

The man’s straight back stiffened momentarily, then he turned his head.

“What’s the matter? You seem different all of a sudden.”

The amount Yuder had released was minuscule, almost a fraction of what he had let out around Ever and Gakane. The fact that Kishiar noticed immediately…

“As expected… It seems certain that my scent can be detected by Commander without any problems.”

“Is this related to what you were about to tell me?”

“Yes.”

Kishiar placed two teacups before them. The tea, a specialty from the south, mingled sweet fruit and floral scents, rich in aroma. Yuder, looking at the steaming golden liquid reminiscent of Kishiar’s hair, began to speak.

“While escorting Elle back to his quarters, I encountered other members, including Gakane and Ever. Both said they hadn’t noticed my scent recently. They thought I had been concealing it, almost to the level of an unmanifested individual.”

“…”

“Strange, isn’t it? I haven’t been locking it away to that extent. You would know that, Commander.”

Kishiar nodded silently but firmly.

Yuder felt a wave of relief.

“I felt I needed to find out when they started feeling this way.”

Yuder recounted the conversation with the two, the test he conducted by releasing his scent, and hesitantly added something he hadn't mentioned to them.

"Truthfully, I even entertained the thought that perhaps my scent is gradually disappearing. Even if that's the case, it wouldn't affect my health or daily life…"

"How can you be so sure?"

Kishiar cut him off. The question seemed inquisitive, but his eyes already seemed to anticipate Yuder's response.

"Is that also from your 'previous game' experience?"

"Yes."

Yuder had thought he had already conveyed all the necessary information related to the previous game, yet here he was, discussing aspects he had deemed unimportant, even deliberately ignored, in the life of Yudrain Aile. This element, previously overlooked, now felt strangely significant.

Feeling his mouth dry, Yuder took a sip of the warm tea, letting it loosen his tightened tongue.

"In the previous game, I manifested as an Omega, just like now, which you already know. I didn't go into detail before, but back then, I was quite known as a scentless Omega."

A scentless Omega. It was the first time Yuder had uttered the term, often used mockingly by others, about himself. He might have felt quite unpleasant if he had to say this in front of others, but his counterpart was Kishiar. Yuder focused on Kishiar's face, trying not to forget this fact.

Kishiar's red eyes gazed back at him, unchanged, devoid of any prejudice or negative emotion.

"That name was given to me because, after my manifestation, no one could sense my scent, and I never went into heat period. Personally, I didn't mind.

I found the heat period inconvenient and saw no problem with my body. However, if the same thing is happening again… I want to find the cause and stop it.”

The scent, which Yuder had only regarded as an inconvenient byproduct of being a second gender manifester, had ceased to feel that way in this life.

More precisely, it was after he realized that a scent could facilitate a deeper connection than words with someone.

Without that experience, Yuder would have probably still considered his scent as merely an inconvenience. Perhaps he would have seriously undertaken the kind of training to suppress his scent, as Gakane and Ever had thought.

“…”

“So, Commander, I would like to know how you have perceived my scent, or if you have noticed any changes. From the test just now, it seemed you didn’t feel it differently from before…”

Crack.

At that moment, the cup in front of Kishiar cracked, and the tea spilled over. Thanks to Yuder’s reflexive action, the tea didn’t drench Kishiar’s legs, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t surprised.

“Commander?”

“…Ah.”

Kishiar, a bit delayed, shifted his gaze to the floating tea and looked at it with an indiscernible expression.

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Chapter 920

“Are you alright?”

“I’m fine, thanks to you.”

Kishiar nodded his head.

“…That’s good to hear.”

“But first… I need to fix this cup.”

“Yes. I’ll clean up the…….”

Thinking Kishiar meant to simply pick up the broken pieces, it came as a surprise when he spread his hand and, with a slight gesture, the scattered fragments rose in unison. They began fitting back into place like puzzle pieces, adhering neatly to their original positions.

‘Is it a pulling force? Can he really align even these tiny fragments?’

Originally, Kishiar’s ability was used to cunningly pull or push people and objects, integrating it with his martial arts. But after meeting Yuder, he began applying it to the unseen, and in the most recent battle, he even interfered with others’ abilities, turning the tide of the battlefield as he wished.

And now, it was as if he was reversing time, repairing the cup to its original state.

The cup, swiftly restored, still showed faint hairline fractures. But as Kishiar ran his fingertips lightly over them, they smoothed out perfectly, as if they had never been broken. This meant he had successfully reattached every fragment, down to the tiniest, almost invisible specks of dust.

Yuder, looking at the immaculate cup, now moved the tea that had been suspended in mid-air back into it. The golden liquid, pouring like water from an invisible teapot, rippled as if nothing had happened.

It was a truly wondrous sight.

His red gaze, lingering on the restored cup for quite some time, finally shifted back to Yuder's face. His beautiful lips parted slowly to speak.

"To answer your earlier question, I haven't felt your scent diminish at all. It has been the same since I first sensed it."

Just as Yuder thought, Kishiar confirmed he hadn't noticed any change. While Yuder felt relieved, having been worried about an unknown possibility, it made discovering the actual problem more challenging.

"I did anticipate that response… But this makes it harder to determine where and why the problem started."

"…Well. But if you want to find the cause, shouldn't we check something else first?"

"What do you mean?"

"Me."

Kishiar uttered quietly.

"Others might be losing the ability to detect your scent properly, but I haven't had that problem. So, it seems more logical to speculate that the peculiarity lies with me, not them."

"…Ah."

It was a surprising, yet valid point. Yuder hadn't even considered this possibility, familiar as he was with Kishiar from a previous life where there had been no issue with scents.

"I see. I hadn't thought of that."

As Yuder swallowed his surprise and nodded, Kishiar’s lips curved up slightly.

“I said I didn’t notice anything odd about your scent just now. But if you had asked about other scents, my answer would have been different.”

Before Yuder could ask what he meant, Kishiar posed his own question.

“Has Elle manifested as an Omega?”

Yuder didn’t fully grasp the intention behind the sudden question, but nodded in response.

“Yes.”

“You would have helped him regardless of whether he manifested as an Alpha, but if that were the case, you would have used a different method than directly supporting him. When you went to get Alek’s medicine, you would have been more cautious considering his different second gender. Am I wrong?”

“…You’re right.”

“Now, doesn’t something seem odd here?”

Kishiar, who had abruptly questioned the oddity of the situation, continued speaking while his fingertips swept over the sofa he was sitting on.

“I may be mentioning this only now, but I have always been quite sensitive in detecting others’ scents. What I just said means I should have known the information the moment I stepped in here. But now…”

Yuder felt a sudden chill at the back of his neck.

Kishiar hadn’t deduced Pruelle’s Omega manifestation through physical detection. He had sifted through Yuder’s actions and concluded the most likely answer.

There was only one implication.

“…You couldn’t detect Elle’s scent, could you?”

Indeed. Kishiar had been sitting here quite comfortably, so much so that Yuder wondered why he hadn’t felt something was amiss immediately upon entering.

What had it been like when Yuder manifested? Even at a distance, it was clear that Kishiar was exerting effort to endure. Even after the manifestation ended, he had avoided direct contact for a while. Of course, this behavior was partly for Yuder, who was still wary of Alphas, specifically Kishiar. But even considering that, Kishiar’s current composed state was strikingly different from back then.

“When I returned here earlier, I did feel a slight, faint sensation. I didn’t know it was the scent of someone who had just manifested. It was only after hearing Kanna’s report and what you continued to say that I could finally be somewhat certain.”

Pruelle had begun his manifestation, but his emitted scent was extremely weak. Even Gakane and Ever had barely noticed it, which suggests that detecting it solely based on the faint scent left here wouldn’t have been easy.

“Even though he has started his manifestation, the fact that his scent was so faint… I thought it could be possible if he were another Alpha manifestor, but if not, then it certainly is a point worth suspecting, isn’t it?”

“Before the Commander returned, Kanna must have ventilated and tidied up the area to eliminate the scent, so that might have had an effect.”

Yuder offered another possibility, but Kishiar shook his head.

“If there had been no change in you, I might have thought the same. But if not, it’s certainly suspicious. Have you forgotten? Even in the vast and sensory-overwhelming imperial palace, I found you by scent alone.”

Yuder recalled the long-ago memory of groaning in pain from the heat of his manifestation, hiding in a corner of the palace’s janitorial closet. Not

long after Kiolla had left to seek help, Kishiar had found him with astonishing accuracy.

A second gender manifester with such a level of detection was not just uncommon; it was almost unheard of. Considering Kishiar's immense power and control, it was natural that he surpassed other Awakeners in detecting scents.

Yet, now Kishiar sat comfortably in the very spot where Elle had been, showing no signs of discomfort.

It definitely wasn't forced endurance. Of course, if he had decided to endure, it would be a different story, but Yuder was confident he could tell if it were so. And there was no reason for Kishiar to do so now.

"When I think about it, since meeting you, I haven't really paid attention to the scents of other manifestors. It wasn't that I suddenly became unable to detect them; it seemed like a gradual change that I didn't notice right away. I hadn't encountered another newly manifested Omega either, so that's probably why. Now that I think about it, this seems to be both similar yet opposite to what Gakane and Ever had mentioned."

Kishiar tilted his head and rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"…Then…"

"It seems we need to understand how other manifesters perceive my scent. Once we're certain about that, we might be able to speculate further."

Yuder bit his lip tightly.

"In the previous game, this never happened. I was the only one without a scent… The Commander was definitely…"

Definitely… What was it like?

Yuder hesitated for a moment. Yuder had never doubted that, in the previous game, Kishiar La Orr was a perfectly healthy second gender manifester,

unlike him. It seemed natural since they had been physically close numerous times, and Yuder had experienced his scent.

But whether others had perceived it the same way was unknown. There had never been a discussion or inquiry about it.

How could any member have properly encountered the Commander, who, rather than diligently working in his office like now, mostly vacated his seat and only stealthily slipped into Yuder's room at night? Conversely, had Kishiar encountered any other second gender manifesters after 'that incident'?

Even now, in this game, where there seemed to be a problem with scents, the ability of Yuder and Kishiar to detect each other's scent remained unchanged from before.

'Then.'

Was it possible that a similar phenomenon existed in the previous life?

The thought, never entertained before, was disconcerting. His head throbbed. The tea in the repaired cup started to tremble, vibrating subtly. Yuder's hand on the table shook as well.

No. To be precise, it was Yuder's trembling hand that was affecting the teacup.

"Yuder."

In the moment when a sharp tinnitus seemed imminent, a hand reached out and grasped Yuder's. Yuder halted his thoughts and looked up.

"It's alright. There's no need to be confused. Even if there's been some change, one thing hasn't: you know that, right?"

Each word felt as if it was etching a permanent mark in his mind.

"I know you, and you know me."

“…”

“We both know better than anyone how we can convey stories to each other in ways that go unheard by others.”

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Chapter 921

“We both know better than anyone how we can convey stories to each other in ways that go unheard by others.”

That was enough. At the same time as those words, Kishiar gently released his scent. Drawn by it, Yuder felt a scent smoothly flowing out from his own body as well.

Their intertwined scents wrapped and soothed their entire bodies. The movement, clear in its intention as if to say only this sensation was necessary, comforted Yuder’s acutely tense nerves. As the scent that followed his inhaled breath cooled the heated turmoil inside his head, Yuder gazed deeply at their fingers, intertwined in a shape that seemed to connect him and the other.

The fingers appeared like a delicately shining thread, probably because of the thought of ‘connection.’

Suddenly, a thought flashed through Yuder’s mind.

“…Today, the three people I met said that the perception of scent changes over time. But… isn’t it not just the scent that changes as time goes on?”

Since Yuder had returned to the past and met Kishiar, many things had changed. Among them, if one were to identify the most noticeable, persistent change, it would be the ‘thread’ - something unknown and mysterious.

This illusion-like entity, invisible to others, was undeniably real. It always connected the two, revealing itself in moments of intense desire to provide assistance, enabling them to find each other, no matter where they were.

Initially, there was only a single, thin strand of this thread, but the last time he saw it, a few days ago, the quantity had increased so much it was hard to count.

Kishiar had named the sensation of this connection as ‘Imprint.’

Imprint. Scent. The difference between the past life and now.

Amid the swirling thoughts in his head, Yuder suddenly spoke.

“Could there be a connection between the changes in our ability to perceive scents and the increase in… our connection? I mean, the thing you thought similar to an imprint that has been growing?”

“Threads and scent… So, you’re saying that as these increase, the changes related to our scents also gradually grew?”

“Yes. There’s no evidence, but these are the biggest changes that happened at the same time, so I think there might be a connection.”

Kishiar slowly nodded.

“There’s logic in that.”

Of course, to confirm this hypothesis, a similar phenomenon should have occurred in the previous game when Yuder had no scent. However, the current Yuder had no information about that part.

Kishiar, too, clearly knew this. After a moment of silence, he looked directly into Yuder’s eyes and asked cautiously.

“Then, in the previous game, did you ever see something like the thread existing between us?”

“…”

“If it’s difficult to answer, we can skip it. After all, understanding the current situation is more important.”

Yuder shook his head.

“No. There’s nothing I can’t talk about. I remember that I never saw such threads in the previous game.”

“Not affirming it but remembering it sounds like there’s a significant difference.”

“Yes, that’s correct. I ‘remember’ it that way, but the reality could have been quite different.”

“What made you come to that conclusion?”

“Because there were a few instances where I realized that there were parts I couldn’t remember between what I recalled and what had actually happened.”

Yuder tried to say those words with the most official tone he could muster. Conveying facts without letting emotions seep through had never been particularly difficult for him.

“In my current memory, there is nothing like the thread. However, separate from that… about the phenomena that occurred when we were connected.”

While saying this, Yuder looked down at their tightly interlocked hands and moved his parched lips.

Should he really be sharing this story with the man before him?

Perhaps the current Kishiar would be better off not knowing.

Even as he continued, this thought lingered in his mind.

The memories of the ‘connection’ Yuder had experienced in his past life were something that even he himself had tried to forget for a long time. He had somewhat succeeded in forgetting them. The Kishiar of now was the same person as before, yet he had already journeyed down a vastly different path. What was the point of reviving such an unpleasant story?

They were things of the past, already gone.

Yuder’s hands turned cold again. Even the scent caressing his body couldn’t overcome the deep-seated chill.

He finished his last words, looking down.

“…There are memories where I felt something similar, albeit it’s quite different from what I feel now…”

The accident that occurred during his manifestation in his previous life lasted a week. After that, Yuder Aile experienced and perceived the world completely differently. Everything was bewildering and unfamiliar, but the most troubling thing for him was the pain that suddenly pierced through him, along with other emotions and sensations.

At that time, Yuder instinctively knew where it all originated from. All those unwelcomed feelings and sensations came from Kishiar. The continuous barrage of emotions and sensations from someone else was a terrible ordeal, especially when they were mostly negative. Yuder felt as if two entirely different beings were forcibly stitched together like patches of cloth.

Kishiar of that time knew it too. He must have felt something similar from Yuder, so it was natural. After regaining consciousness following the accident, he had promised to resolve this phenomenon.

However, the promise remained unfulfilled. The man was killed by Yuder’s hand. Yet, in a way, Yuder was freed from all that forced pain with his death, which could ironically be considered a resolution.

Yuder had long forgotten that fact. Until he dreamt of those times and revived his memories in this life, he had mostly forgotten that he had experienced such sensations.

“In fact, ever since I first saw that thread while searching for you, I’ve always had a question.”

It was a soft voice that pulled Yuder from his reverie. Kishiar, with a smileless face and eyes cast down, continued.

“Where did it start from, and when was it formed? Why does it exist only between you and me, and not others? Such a mysterious connection starting

so silently… doesn’t it lack a certain flair?”

“Flair, you say?”

For a moment, Yuder thought he had misheard.

“Yes, flair.”

A smile finally slipped through on the man’s lips as he confirmed his words.

“At the start of any event, it’s not necessary for there to always be a loud, destined occurrence. Plenty of things can happen without a clear reason. What I’m trying to say leans more towards cause and effect rather than reason. Do you understand what I mean?”

Cause and effect rather than reason. It was a complex analogy, but Yuder felt he roughly understood.

“…I think I grasp the feeling.”

“The connection binding us lacked that. There was an outcome without an apparent cause, suddenly just existing. That’s why, after learning various stories I hadn’t known before, I found myself speculating once again.”

“…”

“Perhaps the beginning of this connection… the imprint, originated from the previous game and continued to here. That this thread was not created by something I did here, but rather…”

Could it have been created in the previous game and somehow persisted to this point?

As Yuder met those red eyes speaking such thoughts, he felt a chill run up his arm. When had he started having such thoughts? From the little Yuder had shared, how far had this man speculated?

A voice from an old dream suddenly echoed in Yuder’s mind.

‘-Pushing away all connections until they forcibly severed… And then….’

Yuder was still not completely certain if that had really been said by him.

The connection that Kishiar thought had vanished with his death might not have truly disappeared. If he told the current Kishiar about that dream, and the ‘connection’ he had experienced previously, could he guess something from it?

…But, unusually, his usually articulate mouth seemed glued shut.

‘After all, the current Kishiar knows everything, even that I killed Kishiar in my past life, so what’s this in comparison.’

As he had said, what mattered was the present, not the past. Yet, despite this understanding, his mind remained cold and dark.

‘Damn it.’

It was the moment he felt anger rising, about to bite his lip.

Suddenly, the entwined hands pulled Yuder in. His lips, caught off guard, were overlapped by another set of lips.

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Chapter 922

Suddenly, the entwined hands pulled Yuder in. His lips, caught off guard, were overlapped by another set of lips.

“…”

It was hot.

The first thought that surfaced in Yuder’s momentarily stilled mind was such a sensation.

Yuder had experienced quite a few kisses until now. They were all with the same person, and not once had he felt indifferent about any of them. An act unimaginable with anyone else seemed the most natural and desired thing when it was with that person.

Despite always feeling new thrills and emotions, this kind of heat was a first.

The heat that came to mind wasn’t the flame-like intensity one might expect during a heat period. Unlike fire that burns upwards, this heat pulling Yuder seemed to move in the opposite direction - heavy and dense.

Yuder vaguely recalled once seeing lava. When intense heat melts the earth and rocks, they lose their original form and become like water. However, this water doesn’t cool anything down but rather evaporates and consumes everything in its dangerous path.

It was not as loud as a fire spreading on the wind but was even more unpredictable because of its silence.

The hottest liquid in the world flowing smoothly downwards, downwards.

Yuder’s sensation was akin to swallowing and accepting this dangerous, hot lava through his lips. The heat slid down his throat into his stomach,

instantly melting the cold emotions that had been frozen solid until just moments ago.

His eyes grew hot. Unknowingly, his body shivered reflexively. Yuder even felt the absurd notion that he might completely melt away due to this overwhelming heat.

What was the intent behind this kiss? Was it to calm him down after seeing him chew his lips in rage? Or was it an attempt to comfort him, having noticed his hesitation about whether to speak of the past or not?

It could be either with Kishiar, but this kiss was far hotter than usual. It felt quite distant from mere calming or comforting.

Why? What was the difference? The moment he harbored this faint doubt, a slender stream of emotion flowed into Yuder's body in response.

Unlike the warmth of the kiss, it was a cold, sharp feeling - unmistakably someone else's emotion. It was brief, but unmistakable. It was something Kishiar was feeling at that moment.

Whenever Yuder had received his emotions before, they were usually so complex and intertwined that it was difficult for Yuder to discern them as a single word. To describe the sensation more vividly, it was like looking at a painting with numerous colors messily overlaid. In a picture where the original colors were so mixed that the boundaries blurred, how could one easily distinguish and name each color? Especially when Yuder Aile, a human, hardly knew about the many colors in the world. If the number of colors he recognized was only about a dozen, then Kishiar probably had hundreds in his palette.

But this time was different. Yuder could quite clearly identify the name of the emotion that had just flowed into him.

Sorrow. And…

'…Fear?'

Fear? Kishiar, of all people?

What could he possibly fear in this situation?

Finally, their lips parted. Yuder, gasping for the breath he had failed to release properly, expelled it as if even letting it go was regrettable. The man, seemingly sharing this sentiment, gently pressed his lips again beside Yuder's.

Yuder wanted to ask about the emotion he had just read. Yet, at the same time, he thought he didn't want to.

It was a feeling similar to earlier when he knew there was no reason not to speak about the past, yet frustration rose as his lips wouldn't part.

'…Ah.'

Yuder's eyes widened slightly and then slowly blinked. He finally understood something.

Fear is not just an emotion felt in the face of an insurmountable enemy or situation. The cold confusion and anger that Yuder himself had felt were, in some way, closely akin to fear.

Then, what about the man before him? Being adept at concealing and controlling emotions doesn't mean he's incapable of experiencing negative ones. He, in fact, knew and felt much more and finer emotions than the starkly impassive Yuder.

Kishiar yearned to discover the unknown phenomena that had changed them without their realization, seeking answers in the past information Yuder might provide. Whatever Yuder would say, Kishiar would gladly listen and think it through with him.

But that caring and rational demeanor was not all there was to him.

While wanting to hear, he might also want to avoid. The emotions one wishes to know are closely linked to those one wishes to ignore. Kishiar

might have needed the same calm he sought to give Yuder, a realization that came to Yuder belatedly, considering himself too dull and slow.

Kishiar, remarkably patient, could sometimes commit surprisingly impulsive acts in matters concerning Yuder.

And the only one in the world who could notice and respond to this side of him was one.

Yuder Aile. Himself alone.

"…"

When he realized this, Yuder felt all the anger and cold fear that had been boiling inside him vanish completely. Unknowingly, he rose from his place and moved closer to Kishiar. Then, reaching out, he caressed the man's cheek and suddenly embraced him tightly. It was a somewhat abrupt and impolite act done without a word, but Kishiar, without any objection, let himself be held as Yuder led.

Their two hearts beat rapidly at different rhythms. Yuder, cooling his boiling emotions, thought of wanting to protect, by all means possible, the being he held in his embrace.

Yes, wasn't that why he had joined the Cavalry and was here now?

Regardless of what had happened in the past, it wasn't more important than Kishiar in front of him. Yuder quickly sorted his thoughts.

"…The words I hesitated to speak or not to speak are related to what happened the last time I saw you in my past life."

"…"

"And that time, it was closely connected to an accident that occurred right after my second gender manifestation. Perhaps, you might have already guessed that much."

Unable to see the man's face as it was buried in his embrace, Yuder contented himself with looking down at the golden locks of hair pressed against his clothes.

"Just now, I hesitated whether or not I should speak of it. But now, I've come to a conclusion."

"…"

"Even if I chose not to speak, Commander, you would have accepted it. But I… want to tell you."

"But before that," Yuder murmured clearly.

"First, I want to make sure if there was a similar change in your scent, Commander, and if there were any similar cases. Preparation is necessary in everything, after all."

The man, his head buried in Yuder's embrace, finally spoke, his breath hissing softly.

"…Yes."

Every matter requires adequate preparation. That was something Kishiar from his previous life had taught Yuder.

Yuder then gently lowered the face that had been nestled in his embrace. The eyes, hidden beneath tousled hair, slowly looked up at Yuder. He slightly pursed his lips and then pressed them against Kishiar's forehead.

"Today, it would be best not to do any more work. Would you rest with me?"

It was a statement with a clear invitation.

Yuder, not considering a refusal, waited for a response. After a moment, Kishiar reached out and pulled him closer by the waist. Yuder couldn't tell if Kishiar was smiling as usual or not.

“Let’s do that.”

The voice that came was a bit moist, lacking the intense heat that seemed to consume everything just a while ago, bringing an inexplicable sense of relief.

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Chapter 923

A squelching sound echoed from between his legs. Despite experiencing it numerous times, the explicitly intimate noise emanating from his own body still felt unfamiliar, especially given its origin.

But what could he do? Perhaps due to the tension he felt all day, his body was unusually unresponsive to arousal. Since he wasn't fully relaxed, reckless actions were more foolhardy than brave, necessitating prior preparation.

The saying that everything requires adequate preparation seemed ironically applicable even here.

Recalling the conversation from earlier, Yuder exhaled a long sigh. The red eyes gazing up at him from below didn't miss a moment, quietly watching his every move. It was precisely the expression Yuder had hoped for.

'I wonder what's going on in his mind.'

Yuder was now straddling the man seated on the sofa, choosing this over the bedroom as even the brief journey there seemed unbearable. Locking the door was as simple as blinking if one's mind was clear enough.

Yuder himself had stopped Kishiar from assisting in the preparation. In fact, when Kishiar realized he was less responsive than usual, he had tried to withdraw, but Yuder hadn't allowed it.

Kishiar La Orr wished to forget everything else and focus solely on this moment. For a man burdened with excessive thoughts, emotions, considerations, and suppressed secrets, stripping him of all these was no easy task.

Thus, Yuder used one hand to support himself against the sofa's backrest, trapping Kishiar's gaze between his legs, ensuring he could only look at

Yuder. At that moment, Kishiar’s only option was to watch Yuder prepare himself.

Looking down, Yuder felt a peculiar satisfaction, as if he had confined Kishiar to his embrace, rendering escape impossible.

Using saliva-laden fingers as lubricant, he felt a heat slightly warmer than his body temperature as he entered himself. Although the natural lubrication was insufficient, it functioned reasonably well when mixed with the saliva. The sensation of inserting his own fingers wasn’t entirely pleasant, but it was more comfortable than someone else’s hand.

Currently, two fingers were inside. As he stirred and moved his wrist, the squelching noise echoed with each motion. Yuder carefully spread his fingers inside, feeling an odd but not painful sensation as he did so. After testing and adjusting his breathing, he briefly withdrew his fingers before adding a third and pushing them back in.

Passing the tightest outer part caused an involuntary tenseness in his body. However, once past this point, the rest was quickly enveloped.

“Huh…!”

Yuder thought he heard an inaudible thud, a hallucination perhaps. The smooth entry of three fingers caused his body to involuntarily jerk, but he managed to suppress it, clenching his teeth. Still, he couldn’t prevent his hand gripping the sofa from tightening, making the leather squeak in protest.

Yuder ceased his movements, bowing his head and taking quick, heavy breaths. The tip of his longest finger, having just grazed something within, elicited a surprisingly strong response that even he found startling. His mind went blank, his breathing trembled, and his muscles reflexively tensed. His inner thighs quivered uncontrollably. Up until moments ago, his frontal genitalia, which had been only slightly erect, now stood half-stiff, quickly engorged with power. A clear pre-cum continuously oozed from its tip, moistening the surrounding area.

He had intended only to slightly stretch himself, not to masturbate, yet the sensation he just experienced was completely unintended.

In his previous life, and even in this one, Yuder's sexual desire had been faint to the point of being almost non-existent, except when he was with Kishiar. He rarely felt a strong reaction to someone else or the need to comfort himself. From the standpoint of someone who had barely touched his own body except when washing, the stimulation he just felt was both unfamiliar and disconcerting.

And those red eyes saw it all.

"…"

Despite the situation deviating from his intention, Yuder felt strangely energized the moment he met those eyes, as if his momentarily halted body regained strength.

Without avoiding Kishiar's gaze, Yuder resumed moving his hand, now a bit faster than before. The provocative sensation he had felt earlier intermittently returned as he repeatedly inserted and withdrew his finger. Although not enough to stop his movements in shock as before, his forehead and back started to sweat from the heat, causing his nearly discarded clothes to stick to his skin.

No matter how well he tried to control his breathing, it became erratic the moment he touched a certain spot inside. With each twitch of his body, his breaths became short and choppy. The sound, initially shallow when he inserted only two fingers, gradually deepened, resembling the noise made when accommodating his genitalia.

He almost bit his fingers off as he pulled out of the tangled inner mucous membrane, leaving just a bit inside before thrusting back in. With each repetition, the clear lubrication oozing from within seemed to increase, soon threatening to trickle down his fingers to his palm. The writhing inside felt so lewd it was hard to believe it was his own body.

He straightened his back and then relaxed it, moving his hand continuously, faster now. He had never thought deeply about the differences in what he inserted, but Kishiar's long, smooth fingers and his own rough fingertips felt utterly different. His mind went blank, then cleared, and then became dizzy again in this cycle, as he endured the fleeting pleasure that surged through him.

He had just thought that perhaps it was time to insert a fourth finger when he began to withdraw his hand.

Due to the slippery liquid, something was properly grazed by his sliding fingertips.

It was a completely different spot from where he had been feeling the stimulation, but the intense sensation whitened his mind.

Without realizing it, his waist jerked backward uncontrollably. His thighs lost strength, and he almost fell, but he was steadied by the hands of the man who had been quietly lying down until now.

"Ah…!"

While it was good to be supported and not fall, the sudden movement caused the finger still in his mouth to twist in a different direction. Yuder bit his lip reflexively, trying desperately to endure the overwhelming stimulation.

Had it not been for the thumb that suddenly penetrated his lips, Yuder would have done just that.

"…"

Startled by the finger he had bitten instead of his lips, Yuder immediately relaxed his grip, though a slight bite mark remained unavoidable. He huddled his back and placed his forehead on Kishiar's shoulder, his body trembling. His breathing was more labored than it would have been even after running over a mountain at full force.

Barely able to move his eyes, Yuder noticed that the area between his legs had become sufficiently moist. Only then did he realize that his fully erect front had been rubbing against the cloth of Kishiar's chest-wrapped garment, but he found himself lacking the strength to rise just yet.

While breathing without uttering a word, the owner of the hand that had supported his back finally spoke.

"…Really, now I think of nothing else."

In a low, subdued voice. Before Yuder could react to it, the man deeply embraced his waist and invaded his lips. Yuder shuddered at the sensation of a finger, much thicker than what had been stretching him before, entering him without hesitation.

Both men knew that no further preparation was necessary. Shortly after the finger withdrew rapidly, something hot touched him from below.

The insertion was accomplished in an instant.

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Chapter 924

The insertion was accomplished in an instant.

Completely drenched, the relaxed entrance stretched to its limit in a flash, filling up inside. Yuder was overwhelmed by a sensation so intense that he found himself unable to even breathe. The shock of pressure, as if everything that could be stimulated inside was about to burst, was in some ways more overwhelming than any torture he had endured.

When his vision, which had momentarily darkened, returned, a wild, animal-like groan, uncontrollable and incessant, escaped through his gritted teeth. Yuder, looking through blurred eyes at the semen he had spilled enough to soak the front of Kishiar's clothes, tightened his grip around Kishiar's neck as if clinging to a lifeline. Even as he gasped and gulped for air, the sensation of being filled and stirred inside was immensely stimulating.

"Uh…ugh…ah…!"

But there was no time to catch his breath. As Yuder surrendered to the unbearable stimulus, collapsing his waist into the man's embrace, Kishiar began to move, strengthening his grip around Yuder's waist.

Kishiar, despite appearing lean, had a body solid with muscle, far from light. Yet, he moved as if lighter than paper. Yuder moaned, instinctively moving in sync as he felt the presence inside him withdraw and plunge back in.

Every time he tensed and then relaxed his legs, which were firmly positioned, his body was struck up and down. The sound of liquid splashing from their connected parts seemed distant, and his fingers, wrapped around, were white with the intensity of his grip.

The same was true for Kishiar. As their movements hastened, Yuder could feel the increasing strength in Kishiar's grip. He seemed to be trying not to

grip too tightly, but Yuder thought he wouldn’t mind it being even firmer.

It wasn’t painful, after all. More. He muttered inaudibly between gasps, pressing his forehead against the shoulder he leaned on. The scent emanating from their sweat-soaked skin was intoxicating, almost as if it wasn’t human but something most tantalizing in the world.

Responding to Yuder’s call, the man, who had tensed his neck muscles, intensified his grip around Yuder’s waist. Simultaneously, his member penetrated deeper than ever before, striking the depths within with an unrestrained force. The sensation of being hit deep inside by its blunt end sent shivers through his insides. Once again, liquid flowed from the tightened spot, and a dizzying climax surged.

“Ahh…!”

He already knew that being on top meant deeper penetration due to his own weight, but today it felt even more profound.

His limbs trembled. His thighs, which had encased Kishiar, were now solely pulling him in tighter for a stronger bond. His body violently yearned for a more intense union. With his upper body clinging to the man embracing him, and his lower body moving in rhythm with the thrusts, every time he was lowered, his buttocks were crushed, and the sensation of their genitals rubbing forcefully against each other was breathtaking. The sofa made a sound as if it was about to collapse, but the noise from their joining was just as loud and didn’t matter.

The sensation of his body being wildly stretched open wasn’t entirely pleasant. There was a pain-like discomfort, and an instinctive sense of crisis from his flesh wildly flailing beyond control. But within that primal, almost savage pleasure, there certainly existed everything Yuder had desired.

An overwhelming satisfaction, as if they were the only two left in a world with nothing hidden.

Eyes, clear and transparent, were fixated solely on Yuder, as if forgetting everything else in the world. It felt like all nerves were connected and

focused solely on the gaze that met below. Despite the impossibility of touch, the eyes' contact seemed to scratch the skin, sending sharp shocks continuously across the body, causing pleasure points, hitherto suppressed, to swell and threaten to burst.

Yuder knew, through instinct, that the end was near. He tensed his abdomen, judging through his primal senses. Inside, a stronger friction than before created a more intense wet sound, echoing robustly due to the writhing, unrelenting grip.

Kishiar furrowed his brow in response, half-closing his eyes. Yuder, captivated by the golden locks damp with sweat trickling down his forehead, kissed them. The kiss trailed from the forehead to the bridge of the nose and slid down, finally merging into another kiss.

The rapid up and down movements made it impossible to kiss properly as before. Teeth clashed, lips continuously misaligned, brushing against cheeks and corners of the mouth.

Yet, even those brief moments when their lips touched brought Yuder an intense pleasure. Filled entirely with Kishiar, above and below, front and back, he felt a sense of fullness akin to satisfaction.

Just a little more.

Just a bit.

It was the moment Yuder gasped for breath between their misaligned lips. Kishiar, moving increasingly faster, released his grip on Yuder's waist and pulled him closer.

Yuder's body, pressed down then sprung up, plummeted down again, engulfing Kishiar completely.

"Ah…!"

A sensation, surpassing any barrier Yuder had experienced before, rendered him rigid. The hand that pulled his head close aligned their lips perfectly.

Their tongues entwined deeply in an unerring kiss. Breath, expelled in shock, was entirely drawn into Kishiar. The deepest part inside, the breath, and everything invisible seemed wholly possessed by Kishiar.

Yuder, rigid in his climax, released a clear, pure liquid, different from the sticky pre-cum or white semen. He felt the hot fluid wetting between his legs in the midst of his release. Kishiar's eyes, too, seemed utterly captivated by the pure sensation.

After the seemingly endless climax, Yuder collapsed atop Kishiar, panting faintly for a long time.

He couldn't muster the energy to move even a finger. How much time had passed, where they were - all such thoughts seemed forgotten. All he felt was the lingering heat on his skin, intermittently trembling.

It was the first time he had been so depleted after just once. It felt more burdensome now than the overwhelming pleasure experienced during heat.

Kishiar, too, repeated the act of breathing in and out, his lips buried next to Yuder's neck. No words were exchanged, but the scents naturally emitted intertwined, communicating their current feelings.

'Yes, this vivid.'

Yuder blinked contentedly, surrendering to the embrace that enveloped him without a gap. As he took several deep breaths, strength gradually returned to his body, seemingly left with nothing but ashes. Soon, the unextinguished ember in his dark, faintly twisted eyes flared up once more.

Yuder lifted his head. Even without calling out, he immediately met the gaze of Kishiar, within which a similar flame quietly flickered.

That was enough. Yuder drew Kishiar's face closer and kissed him.

A moment later, a sound akin to the one before started emanating from the sofa.

-

Yuder opened his eyes in a black void.

It was a sensation hard to describe - unreal yet seemingly existing in reality. The physical senses felt almost numb, yet there was a strange, familiar feeling of perceiving something.

This familiarity stemmed from having experienced this sensation before. Yuder gazed intently into the darkness, pondering.

'…Back here again?'

This was a dream. But at the same time, it could be more than just a dream.

Yuder found himself in that darkness where he had encountered the hands clad in white gloves.

'…If it's as I experienced before, it should appear now.'

The faint memory of being pushed away with a warning not to come back the last time surfaced. But then, as now, Yuder hadn't come here by choice.

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Chapter 925

Yuder had come here only twice before. Both times, it was when he had a dream after a strange crack appeared. However, this time, there had been no significant incidents related to the cracks, leaving him puzzled as to why he had returned.

‘What on earth is this?’ he wondered, sighing deeply in frustration. At that moment, he felt a chilling sensation on his nape. As he hurriedly turned around, unsurprisingly, there where two hands clad in white gloves.

“…”

Yuder, with his energy drained, inadvertently opened his mouth upon seeing the ten fingers hovering slightly away, silently facing him.

“It’s not like I chose to come here.”

“…”

His voice sounded relatively normal, although it still had an underwater echo. He had decided not to pay attention to that anymore.

Whether the white-gloved hands had heard Yuder or not, it remained silent. If there had been a face, eyes, or even a body to read expressions from, it would have been easier to discern its thoughts.

Interpreting emotions from just the hands was impossible. It would have been difficult for anyone, except perhaps for Kishiar himself.

And Kishiar was not here. Yuder pressed his lips tightly and then added another sentence.

“I tried to tell you last time, but you pushed me away. I didn’t come here willingly, so don’t say anything about it.”

Yuder was still unsure of what exactly the hand represented. He thought it might be Kishiar's, specifically from a past life, due to its familiar size and touch, along with an inexplicable certainty. But it might not be the truth. However, looking at it naturally brought back remnants of past life emotions, making Yuder's tone increasingly sharp and hostile. The patience and wisdom acquired over long years of experience were of no use in this situation. It felt like reverting back to his true self around twenty years old.

He was always anxious back then, filled with anger and defiance, partly resigned to his fate.

And the white gloves, like Kishiar of those days, remained unresponsive. Regardless of Yuder's impertinent words, it just appeared to smile, exhaustedly breathing like that man. Yuder overlapped it with the image of Kishiar from his past life, who would lean deeply into his chair, fingers entwined in white gloves on his knee, seemingly just wanting to rest. He clenched his teeth and erased the memory.

"What's the matter? Before, you used to communicate through your fingers."

Frowning, Yuder suddenly remembered what Enon had once said.

"So, you might go there again someday. …Ask if you see it. You said it answered everything you asked."

Meeting unintentionally and conversing with an unknown entity represented only by hands was not easy. But since the opportunity had come so quickly, he decided to put aside his questions about the situation and ask something.

Organizing his thoughts, Yuder began to speak rapidly with the first thing that came to mind.

"This place could be anywhere and nowhere, as you said. Is this the afterlife? Or is it beyond the crack?"

"…"

“Are you an entity I am familiar with? How can you be here? I need more than the difficult-to-understand answer that I am here because I exist. Please explain it more simply. And since I myself do not know how I came to be here, if you have any knowledge regarding this, I would appreciate it if you shared it. I am unable to determine whether this is a dream or reality, which greatly hinders my affairs.”

“…”

“And if you intend to push me away again, I would prefer you just point me towards the exit. I do not wish to experience being pushed and falling like last time. You might not understand, having never fallen yourself, but falling powerlessly is not a pleasant feeling.”

“…”

“You used to answer promptly with your fingers, but now do you dislike even that? Whether you are unwilling or simply not doing it, at least express your intention. Surely, that much can be done with just your fingers.”

Yuder gestured with his fingers, then closed his mouth, having said his piece.

Crossing his arms, he glared, waiting for a response. Finally, the hands clad in white gloves reacted.

More accurately, it was not the hands but the cold air surrounding them that stirred. The sensation was smooth yet piercing, making even the cold, foul-smelling black darkness seem to fade momentarily.

It was like… the many moments when the current Kishiar silently smiled at Yuder.

‘What?’

Startled by his own thought, Yuder frowned, and that small, faint ripple soon vanished like an illusion. Then, finally, the hands in the white gloves

approached Yuder, stopping at the height of his chest. One hand cautiously reached down and tapped the fingertips of Yuder's crossed arms.

Seemingly asking for an open palm, Yuder slowly uncrossed his arms. The white-gloved hands grasped his fingertips and pulled them. The posture oddly reminded him of the times he and Kishiar used to join hands to dance. Ignoring the unpleasant cold sensation, which was unlike those times, Yuder was drawn to the contrast of the hands.

His own hands, clad in black gloves, and the larger hands wrapped in white.

As Yuder gazed at them, the fingers enveloped in white leather began to write on the black glove.

Even though this is all that remains

It's amazing that you treat me as myself

Though it would be better if you didn't.

"…What do you mean, it would be better if I didn't…"

Yuder began to speak, frowning, when the fingers suddenly started moving again.

Your guess wasn't wrong

Almost

That's my guess, after all.

Was the confirmation that his guess was almost right an answer to his question if this place was the afterlife or beyond the crack?

And the last part, written as 'that's my guess,' made Yuder's skin crawl. Had it discerned that the guess came not from him but from Kishiar? With only hands visible, how could it know so much to say such things?

As his thoughts raced, the fingers paused for a moment before starting to write again.

Your coming here

Happens when the gap widens.

Between there and here.

Then you are naturally drawn

By the remnants of power

That hasn't completely burnt out at the end of causality.

"…"

Through the connection.

The word 'connection' unexpectedly pierced his heart. Yuder looked down at his palm and then clenched his teeth tightly.

Connection aside, Yuder pondered over the part about the remnants of power that hadn't completely burnt out at the end of causality.

'Power. The remnants of power,' he echoed to himself.

The term 'hasn't completely burnt out' naturally brought to mind the image of fire.

Typically, the remnants of something burnt by fire were either bones, magic items, or objects imbued with divine power and aura, which were either incredibly durable or protected by some mysterious force. Kishiar was wearing those gloves even at the moment of his death.

Protective gloves, crafted with various magic powers. Was it suggesting that the hand remained because of these gloves? But Yuder sensed that it wasn't just that.

At that moment, the contrast between the two gloves and his that had previously caught his attention came to mind again.

Black gloves and white gloves.

The hands within them.

Yuder knew well what lay beneath his own gloves. His skin, marred with grotesquely bulging, blood-red veins, would display a distinct presence.

His hand had transformed after inadvertently absorbing the power released from the Red Stone during its retrieval.

Among the many changes that marked the division between his past and present lives, this was one of the earliest and most significant transformations.

Yuder had speculated through dreams of his past life that Kishiar must have had a similar reason for wearing his gloves.

However, this remained a speculation; he had never seen the bare hand beneath that glove, not even at the time of Kishiar’s death.

If the bare hand inside was, as Yuder suspected, in a similar state to his own, it would serve as evidence that the man from the past life indeed harbored a power akin to the essence of the Red Stone within his body.

The unburnt remnant.

A powerful force.

Feeling like he was on the verge of grasping something significant, Yuder impulsively moved his hand.

His fingers, clad in a black glove, grabbed the end of the white glove and pulled.

Surprisingly, the white glove slipped off easily, without any resistance.

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Chapter 926

At last, the hand within the glove revealed itself.

Yuder, with his lips tightly sealed, gazed upon the hand covered in ghastly crimson marks. He had thought they might disappear like a mirage or illusion as soon as he removed the glove, but that was not the case. It was a wound unlike any he had ever seen. A particularly noticeable injury resided on the back of his hand, so dark and decayed it almost looked like a hole, surrounded by a chaotic pattern of marks resembling worms. The marks were reminiscent of veins or burn scars but did not perfectly match any known injury. Yuder was acutely aware of a cold, metallic smell emanating from it.

Around the wound, there were patches of smooth, unblemished skin, though limited in extent. However, this area was so discolored that it hardly resembled human flesh.

Despite looking fragile enough to crumble at any moment, the hand retained its original form. Certain parts, like the unbroken nails and the contours of bones protruding through the skin, were indistinguishable from a healthy man’s hand Yuder knew. This only added to the eerie feeling it gave off.

Anyone who saw this hand would instantly recognize that these were no ordinary wounds. Such injuries were unheard of anywhere in the world. A person of faint heart might have screamed in instinctive disgust and fear upon seeing it.

Yuder observed the hand for a long time before turning it over to inspect the palm, which was not much different from the back in its grotesque appearance. The epicenter of the wound was nearly the same, but the palm was even more ghastly and widespread.

The word “penetration” flashed through his mind.

“…”

Yuder slowly released his hand and gingerly removed the glove he wore.

A familiar sight of a hand covered in dark red veins emerged. Though not a pleasant sight either, it was different yet similar to the hand before him. The bizarre nature of the injury was the same, characterized by a pattern that seemed to spread out wildly from a central point. However, unlike the utterly ruined hand of the man, Yuder’s hand, while containing something dark red within its veins, appeared otherwise normal. The texture and condition of the skin had not changed noticeably from before.

Similar injuries implied a common cause.

But the outcomes were starkly opposite.

The reason for this was straightforward. Yuder had successfully recovered by embracing the power of the Red Stone, the cause of the injury, while the other had not.

A sense of weakness left his hand. Yuder let his gaze fall from his hand and exhaled deeply, his heart pounding as if it were in his head.

He faintly remembered something Enon had once said.

The power inherent in the Red Stone was akin to the source of all Awakeners’ power, a highly concentrated and potent essence. Enon had likened it to poison.

Yuder’s body had successfully assimilated this poison, allowing him to blend it with his own power. Enon had remarked that Yuder had ‘good material’ for this task.

However, Enon had also said that this was likely only possible for someone like Yuder; anyone else would have failed to assimilate it and would have perished. Yuder had agreed with this.

Kishiar La Orr’s body was undoubtedly robust. His survival, despite harboring such immense strength and talent that one might wonder if

another like him existed in this world, was due to the sheer greatness of his physique and vessel. Had his qualities not been exceptional, how could he have endured the extreme training while embracing powers that others found difficult to contain even one of?

However, there is ultimately a limit to the power a single person can hold. Yuder, having examined Kishiar's interior several times, was well aware of the current state of balance in his power.

Kishiar's inner power was always precariously balanced. Though the entangled threads of power had loosened considerably compared to the past, granting him more stability, it would still have been extremely difficult for him, even with his vast vessel, to contain more power or to excessively disrupt this balance. Only someone of Kishiar's caliber could manage these powers and live; for anyone slightly less skilled, these powers would have been a futile treasure, possessed but unusable throughout their lifetime.

He had spent his life constantly adjusting the balance of his own power and would have to continue doing so.

What if Kishiar had suddenly been infused with the same potent poison that had entered Yuder's body?

It would have been nothing less than a cataclysmic event, shattering the world of a single human body. Yuder and Kishiar were different; Yuder possessed only the power derived from the Red Stone, and a body most accustomed to and close to that power.

No one could have saved him.

This hand in front of him was the remnant of a man who had shattered so meaninglessly.

"…"

Yuder had suspected it might be so. Hadn't he already encountered this information in a dream?

Yet, witnessing it in reality brought a starkly different feeling.

His breath, slipping between his parted lips, vanished into nothingness. No matter how many times he breathed in and out, it hardly felt like he was breathing at all.

Yuder could not fathom what he was feeling at this moment.

It was the hand of the man he had killed.

But at the same time, it was also the hand of the man he loved.

Until now, he had only considered the present, feeling no need to distinguish between the two. But at this moment, everything was muddled, beyond comprehension.

In the seething silence, Yuder recalled the man who had never removed his gloves. The man's touch, always hidden beneath white leather gloves, had always left Yuder with nothing but a cold sensation. In the deep darkness, barely discernible, Yuder would only see the gloves covering the hands clasped around his wrists or resting on his arms. It was impossible to turn and see more in the oppressed position. Those hands never stroked his face or skin properly, except to restrict his movements.

The hands that would silently retreat as if even a lingering gaze was too much to bear.

Yuder had once suspected that the man, being of noble birth, wore gloves because he disliked touching a commoner like Yuder. It was common for nobles to mix with commoner concubines without fully undressing, revealing only parts of their bodies.

Even though the man must have known of Yuder's suspicions, he never explained, leading Yuder to believe it was the truth.

During those numerous nights, Yuder experienced fleeting yet profound misery. With each physical response of pleasure, an inexplicable, clumsy hope grew inside him, one that he couldn't eradicate. The wounds to his

pride, stained anew each time that indescribable thing shattered. The realization on those miserable days that the man behind him was the only chest he could lean on and rely upon. Each time, the sprouts of his withering emotions dried up.

Simultaneously, he recalled certain memories newly discovered in this lifetime.

Emperor Keilusa, with a cracked vessel and death looming, had long avoided proper contact with his Empress. It had been years since he had only sent the Empress to official events, and at some point, they were rarely seen together. They even went so far as to not share a carriage when traveling to the same location.

On the day everyone risked their lives to mend his vessel, the Emperor, thinking he might die, coldly ordered that the Empress be kept away from him.

What a frigid attitude for a husband. If one did not know that imperial family members with vessel issues could unknowingly harm or kill everything they touched, from people to animals to objects, no one would have felt any warmth in his words.

If one did not know how deeply Emperor Keilusa loved his wife.

If one did not sense that Keilusa La Orr's instinct, not as an Emperor but as a man, was desperately longing to see, hear, and touch his wife just one more time.

If Yuder had not understood that truly cherishing and worrying about someone meant having to act colder and more ruthlessly, he too would not have understood him.

And now, Yuder felt a pain infinitely similar yet far greater than that time.

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Chapter 927

Kishiar, in the present, did not prefer to wear gloves even at official events. There had been a time when touching anything with bare hands was a luxury he couldn’t afford due to certain complications. Now, fully recovered, he found little desire to wear them. Yuder, realizing another lingering effect from that time, noted how Kishiar particularly enjoyed touching him with bare hands.

Kishiar often touched Yuder, before, during, and after their encounters. It was frequent, almost to the point of tedium, but never once did it feel careless or thoughtless.

His touch was always cautious. He would start by gently tapping with his fingertips, and only when he felt it safe, would the rest of his skin slowly make contact. This unique way of touching was so distinctive that Yuder felt he could recognize Kishiar with his eyes closed. There were times when such delicate contact felt embarrassingly overcautious, like handling the finest glassware.

Yet, recalling the look in his eyes when he said that the beloved horse he had carelessly touched as a child had later been found dead, Yuder found himself reluctant to voice any complaints.

Kishiar, now averse to gloves, contrasted starkly with the still-gloved hand before him. Was there really such a great difference between them? The entanglement of Kishiar and Yuder’s lives was relatively short compared to the much longer lives they had led separately. Could it be that one despised touching commoners enough to always wear gloves, while the other did not?

Yuder knew all too well that Kishiar La Orr was not the person others described. He never intimidated anyone with his status, nor was he a lustful aristocrat. In fact, Kishiar seemed to find more joy in what others would consider challenging or impossible tasks, reveling in them like an enthusiast.

The shock Yuder felt when Kishiar expressed his preference for conversation with him over physical intimacy still lingered vividly.

Now, with the accumulation of knowledge and memories, a clear answer began to emerge.

No matter how much he wanted to deny it or look away, if that was the only conclusion left after eliminating all others…

The memory of someone who had unconditionally trusted and believed in him came to mind.

And then there was Kishiar, a master actor capable of feigning cold rationality better than anyone. Even Yuder, with all his experience, had been deceived by him.

Thinking he understood all this…

The sensation of burning behind his eyes, his heart pounding so loudly it felt like it might burst, yet all these feelings felt distant to Yuder.

He didn’t know how to express this overwhelming internal turmoil. He wanted to shout, to ask questions, or to silently retreat to a place where no one could find him. Yet, in reality, he could do none of these.

Having changed so much since his return to the past, he had believed in those changes and planned to continue altering his future.

But the being before him was a living proof that the sins Yuder had committed, the truths he had been ignorant of, could never be altered in such a way. Yuder’s lips quivered several times before he barely managed to speak.

“…You are…”

It was then, before he could finish his words, the other gloved hand approached and opened its fingers.

The hand paused momentarily near Yuder's face, then slowly, almost awkwardly, brushed against his cheek. The movement seemed to carry a purpose beyond mere contact. Looking down, Yuder noticed something on the fingers that had touched his cheek. It was difficult to discern in the darkness, but he could tell it was a liquid.

Moving his own hand to the same spot, he felt a substance identical to what stained the white glove.

A hot, transparent liquid with no color or viscosity.

"…"

What could this be? A moment later, an absurd emotion surged within him.

People had often said that tears were foreign to Yuder, a sentiment he himself had shared. He had never understood why others cried, and even when subjected to horrendous torture for months before his execution, he did not shed a single tear, earning the reputation of being unbreakable.

The torturers, finding it bizarre and terrifying that no amount of torment could make him cry or break his spirit, were numerous. Even when one of his eyes was gouged out in an attempt to subdue him, he did not wail but instead faced them squarely, a legend that persisted among the soldiers guarding the prison.

Not even the deaths of his close companions or at Kishiar's funeral did Yuder show any sign of sorrow. There were sarcastic suggestions that he should get medically examined, as it seemed he lacked the physical capability to produce tears.

This trait continued in this lifetime as well. Even when the Cavalry members tried to make him cry by betting on bringing chopped onions before him, his reputation remained largely unchanged, albeit in a slightly different context from his previous life.

Yet, there was one moment, barely acknowledged, when he wondered if it was 'such' a moment. It was the day he first became intimate with Kishiar

in this life. On that day, Yuder struggled to breathe, overwhelmed not by the expected pain or pleasure of intercourse, but by an enormous wave of emotions and sensations too profound to comprehend.

That vast something he felt when he fully accepted Kishiar, his heart pounding as he recalled Kishiar's eyes, flickering with indescribable emotions and burying his head while smiling. A strange sensation enveloped Yuder, his chest heaving, a heat rising within him, making it seem impossible to maintain his composure without swallowing it back down.

Perhaps that was the moment he might have cried, or even did cry.

But why now, here?

The unbearable weight he felt was the same, but the emotion it evoked was the polar opposite of the bright and warm feeling from that time. Yuder lowered his hand with the tear, his face expressionless. Meanwhile, the tears continued to stream down his cheek and jaw.

Many who had questioned whether Yuder too was human, would they have said anything if they had seen this sight? Yuder felt as if a vast ocean, unknown even to himself, existed within his chest, raging with storms. With each tumultuous wave crashing and pounding within, an indescribable agony wrung his lungs, seemingly robbing him of the strength to even think.

Perhaps what was now flowing out was part of those shattered waves.

When Yuder remained silently standing, a hand reached out again. It no longer touched Yuder's cheek, instead, it pulled at the white glove he still held, drawing it off with a movement too elegant for the situation. The hand, sliding fingers between the leather, pulled down.

And then, it tugged at his sleeve.

"…"

Yuder glanced down at his taut sleeve for a moment before moving his feet, following the lead. He was in darkness so profound that no ground seemed visible to step upon, yet somehow, he could walk wherever it led.

How long had he walked these incomprehensible steps? Before long, something resembling the place he had been previously pushed and fallen into came into view.

A vast chasm that appeared distant yet simultaneously close.

From somewhere, a chilling sound and the sensation of something writhing were felt.

Upon reaching there, the hand that had been pulling him stopped and placed a forefinger on Yuder's palm.

Look carefully.

What truly matters.

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Chapter 928

Look carefully.

What truly matters.

Frankly, Yuder's current state of mind was more inclined to wonder what exactly mattered in this situation.

Yet, the hand clad in a white glove kept writing, the same content as before but with rougher, more sluggish movements.

It was different from before, when every letter was clearly written to be easily recognizable. If Yuder had not been familiar with Kishiar's usual handwriting, calligraphy, and even the false script used for encoding secrets, he would not have been able to discern the stiffness of the movement.

Therefore, Yuder found himself compelled to ask, "Does it become difficult to move when you come here?"

"…"

The hand did not respond.

Was it harder to move upon approaching this place, or was it urgency that caused such a change? Without an answer, it was impossible to be certain. However, due to the ominous nature of the movement, Yuder eventually acted as the other desired.

Turning his gaze once more to the distant darkness, it seemed profound and ominous. It was as if it were a pit vast enough to contain the entire world, with endlessly writhing silhouettes appearing and disappearing. The place emitted an abhorrent and fearful stench, its origin inexplicably unnoticed until that moment.

Yuder instinctively felt he should not look too long at those things, at what lay beneath. A dizzying and perilous sensation washed over him, as if he might be swallowed by that pit.

The writhing black shadows in the pit clawed over each other, building up like a tower and then collapsing like a sandcastle made of mud, only to repeat the process. Yuder shifted his gaze towards their intended destination. There, a slit barely perceptible existed.

He had glimpsed it before, but what exactly was that slit? In this place of deep and shallow darkness, only that spot seemed to reveal a different color upon closer inspection.

Focusing solely on that spot, Yuder began to discern something through the small gap. It was different from the pervasive darkness, a faint shimmering…

"…Water?"

Yes. It was water.

But not still water like that in a pond. It was more like a river… no, even more regular in its flowing and ebbing. Yuder felt he had seen something like it somewhere before. As he pondered, a glimpse of white foam caught his eye.

Water with white foam.

It was the sea.

Beyond that gap was certainly the sea Yuder knew.

Even as he stood dumbfounded in realization, the writhing entities continued to stretch towards, squeeze through, and try to break through the gap. Most collapsed, but some reached and momentarily blocked the slit. Though it was too narrow to escape through, the slit seemed slightly wider after they fell away.

It was as if the gap widened with each forced entry, torn and shattered.

No matter how narrow, the shadows filling the pit never gave up. They kept falling, climbing, scraping, all moving towards one place.

As if reaching beyond was their sole purpose.

Through the gaps, something resembling water shimmered, reflecting a brief flash of light. In that moment, Yuder was able to see the true nature of the writhing shadows within the crevice a bit more clearly.

They were eyeballs with long hairs attached. Hands with leg bones, and wings bizarrely fused with fingers and toes. Among the rustling of dried, leaf-like scales, broken teeth clattered, melting like mud over clamshells, as the creatures writhed.

All these elements entangled, biting and swallowing each other, sometimes clinging together in a desperate effort to climb even a little higher.

"…"

Yuder, who had seen many sights in his life, had never encountered such grotesqueness.

At the moment Yuder held his breath, as if warned by instinct, an eyeball with long hairs rolled and stared directly at him.

Then, a white-gloved hand grabbed Yuder's.

He turned and ran as led. An immense vibration felt at his back. In a feeling akin to being chased, he ran through the pitch darkness, unable to see even a step ahead, like a recurring nightmare.

'…Ah.'

He soon realized he was falling again.

But this fall was different from the previous ones; the white glove still clutched in Yuder's hand.

In the silent descent, only the texture of the glove in his hand and its soon-to-be-crushed firmness were distinct.

What would happen if he held onto this hand until the end?

As this thought flickered through his mind, the glove seemed to slip away from Yuder’s grasp. It was as if it had read his thoughts again, just like before.

Despite trying to hold on several times, it was futile. The glove, which had until now remained in Yuder’s hand on its own accord, easily loosened its entwined fingers, as if it could leave whenever it decided.

Yuder gritted his teeth.

The more the fall continued, the weaker his body became. His mind grew increasingly hazy. Unable to resist the inevitable flow, Yuder sensed the end. He struggled to keep his eyes open until the very last moment, even though it seemed futile. And just as his efforts were about to extinguish, he slowly opened his mouth, glaring at the white glove slipping completely from his hand.

“…you told me not to come.”

“…”

“I’ll come again.”

“…”

“By any means necessary.”

As his consciousness was completely engulfed in darkness, he wasn’t sure if he had spoken his last words properly.

The afterimage of the white glove flickered and disappeared like a mirage in water.

-

“…”

When Yuder opened his eyes, Yuder realized he had risen at a familiar time. Dawn, when the sun was about to rise. In the dim darkness, a tranquil air floated in the bedroom. Turning his eyes while still lying down, he saw Kishiar lying beside him, embracing his body. The warmth felt from the touching limbs was comforting.

Kishiar, like Yuder, lay with bare shoulders and eyes closed, but upon sensing Yuder’s gaze, he opened his eyes as if all sleep had suddenly fled.

“…Yuder?”

The familiar low voice, that call, inexplicably tore at his heart. Yuder quietly observed his face reflected in the dark red pupils. The man with black hair reflected in them lay powerlessly, his face expressionless yet incongruously wet with tears.

Yuder exhaled deeply. Then, he raised his upper body and wiped his face, only to find his palm wet with tears whose onset he couldn’t pinpoint.

To him, this moisture felt like the most concrete evidence that everything he had just experienced was not a dream.

“Did something happen?”

As usual, Kishiar hadn’t felt anything while Yuder dreamed of meeting the white glove. Yuder was relieved by this fact, but it also stirred complex emotions within him.

As Yuder remained silent, merely gazing at Kishiar’s face, Kishiar, sensing something, refrained from asking further and gently placed his hand on Yuder’s cheek. His hand, colder than usual and slightly trembling, wiped away the wetness streaking Yuder’s face.

Yuder, feeling the hand caressing his face, gently lowered his eyes and leaned his head against Kishiar, seeking solace.

Just for a moment, he wanted to stay like this. Understanding his unspoken wish, Kishiar's hand paused in its motions. Then, his other hand reached out and enveloped Yuder's shoulder, drawing him close. Yuder inhaled Kishiar's scent repeatedly, as he had the night before. Kishiar's scent, usually more steady, seemed to quiver with unease, but when it reached Yuder, it wrapped around him with the same carefulness as always, ensuring nothing was provoked. In it, Yuder sensed Kishiar's willingness to wait until he was ready to speak, along with a glimpse of suppressed worry and pain.

Kishiar loved Yuder Aile.

Could anyone in the world desire and yearn for someone like Yuder to this extent?

It was an undeniable fact, even Yuder himself couldn't question.

Knowing this made the realization he came to after eliminating all other possibilities feel almost maddening. Even though it was essentially the same conclusion as before, Yuder couldn't bear the gnawing pain in his heart.

He exhaled as if to expel the pain and finally spoke.

"…I met the white gloves again."

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Chapter 929

“…I met the white gloves again.”

The hand that was embracing Yuder tightened ever so slightly and then relaxed. Kishiar, upon waking up, might have anticipated Yuder’s unusual reaction to a certain extent. But expectations and reality are always different. Had Yuder not just keenly felt this?

Yuder continued speaking amidst his silence.

“Living twice, there were many things I did not know… Especially about you, Commander. Most of these things, I only came to understand after my return.”

“…”

Kishiar’s past. The dreams he cherished. The many secrets he kept hidden from the public.

And even his inner self, concealed behind countless walls and deceptive masks.

The Kishiar that Yuder thought he knew and the man before him now were entirely different. Had all these things not returned from the past, they would have remained forever unknown.

And thanks to this, Yuder had finally come to realize a truth he might have forever overlooked.

“…Did you come to know something you wished you hadn’t?”

Kishiar asked quietly, his voice so serene it was hard to discern any emotion. Yuder, still leaning on his hand covering his face, slowly but surely shook his head.

“No.”

Yudrain Aile would have answered yes affirmatively. The same question posed to the Yuder who had just returned and was wary of Kishiar would likely not have differed much.

Because, back then, even if Yuder had known the truth sooner, he would not have believed it.

To one without belief, no amount of logical and clear evidence makes a difference. After all, none of it would be properly seen or heard.

But now was different.

Because he loved Kishiar La Orr and was certain of his love in return, Yuder, at the moment he removed his gloves, came to realize and believe everything.

Even if it was a painful and hard-to-believe truth.

He had now clearly learned how an intangible belief could mean so much to someone.

“It’s just that I’ve come to know now what I inevitably had to know someday.”

“…”

“There’s more that needs to be done now, I realize.”

Even as he spoke, the hand covering his face remained wet. His voice showed no sign of faltering, nor did his expression, yet it was strange.

Perhaps it was because the man before Yuder wore a much more pained expression as he witnessed this scene. Yuder slowly felt his tears, like remnants of a dream, diminish.

The remnants of pain from the dream disappeared, replaced by a determination much greater and firmer than all those emotions.

It’s not difficult anymore to explain everything that happened. But to do so, a story untold yesterday must precede. Kishiar was not yet ready to ‘prepare to listen’, so time was needed just the same.

Yuder took a deep breath. His body shivered reflexively for a moment, then the tears stopped completely. He emerged from the man’s embrace, vigorously rubbing and wiping his face.

“I’m fine now. But more importantly…”

The most bizarre things he saw in the dream. The hands in the white gloves trying to convey ‘something more important’. As he tried to organize his thoughts, suddenly, a loud thud was heard in the distance.

Then, once again, thud, thud.

The moment Yuder realized it was the sound of someone forcefully knocking on the door, his nerves instantly tensed. In the profound darkness of his mind, the lingering shadows began to intertwine chaotically.

‘Could it be?’

Just as a premonition surged within him, the distinctive voice of Nathan Zuckerman came from beyond the closed door.

“Duke, Your Highness, I apologize for the intrusion, but there’s urgent news. Are you awake?”

Kishiar glanced at Yuder’s sharply tensed face and responded with a calm voice.

“Yes, what is it?”

“We’ve just received a message through the Herne family’s communication network. There’s been an unusual incident near the sea, accompanied by a request for assistance. Additionally, several urgent letters have arrived from the dispatchers of the Cavalry stationed in various regions. Including Deputy Commander Meghna Kurlieva, the southern army of the Empire will soon arrive here.”

The knight, speaking rapidly, finished his last sentence with a grave voice that conveyed the urgency of the situation.

“It seems you’ll need to meet them right away.”

Before Kishiar could speak, it appeared that the incident Yuder had foreseen had occurred sooner than expected.

“…It’s a disaster.”

Kishiar turned his gaze towards Yuder’s muttering.

“I was just about to tell you something related to that. I was going to say that what we’ve been preparing for might finally be happening…”

“Is it also among the things you learned through the hands in the white gloves?”

Kishiar quickly grasped the hidden meaning and asked.

“Yes.”

“Understood. If there’s no more immediate information needed, we can discuss the rest later. You may elaborate when necessary.”

Kishiar rose from his seat. Yuder quickly donned his clothes and prepared to leave, observing the man’s movements. There was not a hint of hesitation in his actions. The soft and pained look in his eyes towards Yuder, and the tender scent, had now been neatly put away as if nothing had ever happened.

A typical behavior of his, cleanly separating personal from official matters.

But sometimes, there are things that even perfection cannot hide. Yuder felt a faint surge of emotion flood within him. More than an emotion, it resembled a tingling pain, a feeling transmitted from Kishiar.

Knowing that he was not truly unaffected, how could Yuder just leave because the situation was urgent?

Perhaps he could have done so in the past, but not now.

Yuder hesitated for a moment, then called out to him.

“Commander.”

Kishiar turned his head. Tilted slightly, he looked like someone completely unrelated to the pain he had just felt.

Instead of revealing that he had just felt Kishiar’s emotions, Yuder took another deep breath and spoke again.

“…Kishiar.”

The man who had been looking at Yuder with a steady gaze, now blinked in surprise for a moment. His red eyes wavered, and the emotions he had kept at bay began to flow out.

“…This is rather sudden. What is it?”

For the first time, perhaps, Yuder called him by his name with a clear mind and spirit, looking directly into his eyes. But now, he did not entertain the self-mocking thought that this might be rude or insulting. It was just the two of them here, and whatever Yuder called him, no one would object.

And in Yuder’s judgment, only by calling him by his name could he fully convey the feelings he was experiencing.

“As you said, the immediate priority is to address the matter at hand, but before that, there’s something I must say.”

“What is it?”

“I’m glad you’re here today.”

“…”

Seemingly taken aback by the unexpected remark, Kishiar momentarily parted his lips in surprise. Yuder continued speaking clearly and directly

into his eyes.

“The reason I shed tears earlier, to be honest, I’m not entirely sure myself. However, I believe the truths I’ve come to understand today will help rather than hinder today’s tasks. I hope you can see it that way too.”

Kishiar, who had been slightly moving his lips as if to speak, eventually looked down and murmured Yuder’s name like a sigh.

“Yuder…”

“I’ll be frank. In the previous game, I failed to prevent an event like what happened today. It remained one of my deepest regrets, but this time, I intend to change that outcome.”

“Yes, I know. That’s why we’ve been preparing together.”

However, Kishiar is still unaware of what Yuder has seen. Who could imagine the grotesque things lurking in that deep, profound darkness, frantically trying to squeeze through the smallest gaps? Even Yuder, who had faced all sorts of challenges and believed himself prepared, was momentarily rendered thoughtless upon seeing them.

Only now did it occur to him that those unknowable things, which he couldn’t properly discern in the dream, might fundamentally be the same as the monsters he’s faced. The instinctive fear and powerlessness he felt upon witnessing their lair closely resembled the sensations he experienced when confronting monsters beyond his power.

Perhaps the hands in the white gloves were trying to show Yuder what he must confront from now on.

The moment he recalled those entities, a chill ran through his stomach, and nausea surged up. The feeling, which made even his firm belief seem distant and faint, brought back memories of the numerous despairs and frustrations he had felt in his previous life.

But Yuder refused to be consumed by those emotions.

He had come to realize that Kishiar La Orr, present here, and those in ‘that place,’ were determined to support Yuder’s cause in whatever way they could.

“Yes, exactly. We will certainly prevent it. And after that…”

Yuder looked into his face and placed the final words in his mouth.

“I plan to come and save you.”

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Chapter 930

After blinking several times, the man suddenly let out a hollow laugh.

“…Me?”

“Yes.”

“This seems to have several meanings.”

“…”

“Anyway, I understand. I’m incredibly curious now. After finishing this task, I must come back and hear the details.”

“Your Highness.”

Nathan Zuckerman called out to Kishiar once more. It was an implicit signal that there should be no further delay.

It certainly seemed like today was the day when something would begin.

Suddenly, Yuder remembered the sensation of the white gloves he saw in his dream, answering that he came to that place whenever a significant crack opened.

‘Up until now, I always went there after a significant crack occurred and things got out of hand… But this time, did I go before it happened?’

If asked which was better, obviously this time was better. Knowing in advance allowed for some mental preparation.

“Alright. Let’s go and see how well-prepared we are.”

Kishiar’s eyes changed. He opened the door with a relaxed smile, followed by Yuder, who lifted his head a step behind. Nathan Zuckerman, standing

behind the door, greeted them in formal military attire, which he seldom wore.

“I anticipated a large gathering today and decided it would be better to use the larger space downstairs than the cramped office. I will guide you there.”

Despite Nathan Zuckerman’s unchanged expression, Yuder glanced at the sofa in the office just before leaving. It wasn’t broken, but the cushion was half-collapsed. It was definitely better to go somewhere else than to hold a meeting in front of that sofa.

‘…Next time, it’s probably better to avoid using the office.’

It was the first time he had such thoughts before a serious situation. Kishiar, noticing where Yuder’s gaze had fallen, slightly narrowed his eyes. It wasn’t a mistake to feel, even for a brief moment, that his gaze had returned to that of the man who could only think of embracing Yuder.

Perhaps the jokes and forced laughter people make in serious situations are due to emotions similar to what this brief exchange of glances brought. Such a thought came to him for no reason.

The office door closed, holding a secret known only to the two of them.

-

“Good day, Commander.”

Inside the conference room, already many had arrived.

For the first time since leaving the capital, the three Deputy Commanders of the Cavalry had gathered in one place.

Central members in charge of the southern, western, and northern branches, including a few members Yuder had personally assigned tasks to, and some who had been dispatched to nearby branches, like Mclara, had also returned.

Of course, collaborators outside the Cavalry were also present. The Empire's Special Forces Captain Sunz and Emon, General Gino's closest adjutant, Meghna Kurlieva, and Lady Myra El Herne, the First Princess of the Herne Duchy, who had been resolving the region's turmoil, were there, accompanied by a few knights.

Yuder carefully observed each person, sharing nods in a strange mood.

'This selection is more than enough to oversee the entire south from here.'

Normally, gathering such a diverse group at once would be incredibly difficult. People from different organizations and professions had all come here, trusting in the Cavalry alone, as soon as something unusual happened.

Even though discussions had taken place beforehand, the situation was made possible due to mutual trust and the judgment not to take the situation lightly.

This was a spectacle akin to a miracle, something that had never occurred in a previous life.

All this was because Kishiar La Orr and the Cavalry he led had taken Yuder's words seriously, not overlooking the early signs that had arisen. If they had dismissed the minor anomalies and omens, not exaggerating them to prepare for the impending chaos under the guise of preparation, today's event would have been impossible.

While Yuder was silently swallowing emotions unknown to others, Lady Myra was the first to speak.

"As you might have already heard, just before dawn today, unusual waves and tremors were detected off the coast of Charloin. Since the day of the hailstorm, the Charloin security forces and the Herne family's private soldiers have been continuously monitoring, allowing us to receive the news immediately."

Lady Myra had received the news alongside the acting administrator temporarily replacing Charloin's former lord, whom she had accused of

negligence and embezzlement, and the knight commander leading the security. These individuals, soon to be under the new Duke of Herne, possessed enough judgment not to dismiss her due to her young age.

“As soon as we received the news, we remembered what the Cavalry Commander had advised earlier and began evacuating the citizens near the port, as we had previously planned. The evacuation is still underway, but it will be completed soon. Currently, knights and soldiers are standing by near the breakwater, continuously monitoring the situation.”

Though the report came in the dead of night, when everyone was asleep, that was irrelevant. Lady Myra had always received reports regardless of whether she was sleeping or eating and had always dealt with them immediately. Thanks to her efforts, she could rush over so quickly today.

Yuder quietly observed Lady Myra, veiled in black. Though not clearly visible, she looked thinner and more worn than before, her voice roughened by accumulated fatigue, losing half of its original clarity. Yet, Yuder judged that her condition was not as bad as he had thought.

‘Her eyes seem much deeper than before. Considering what she’s been through, it’s understandable.’

She had lost most of her family on the day of the hailstorm and was left alone. Despite experiencing such a tragic event that warranted sympathy, her focus on her duties without being consumed by sorrow was remarkable.

“Your swift response and decisive action are commendable, Lady Myra. The Cavalry will immediately deploy the personnel we’ve prepared.”

At Kishiar’s nod, Kanna caught his glance and quickly signaled the Cavalry members waiting behind. It was the signal to deploy the personnel ready to head to Charloin’s coast at any moment.

Next to speak was Ever.

“This morning, we received reports of unusual distortions observed in the regions of Mclara, Tuban, Sluban, and Alsara. As you know, these areas

have been under joint security support from the Cavalry, Charloin's security forces, and the imperial army since the day of the hailstorm."

These four regions had experienced short-lived cracks since the hailstorm, appearing and disappearing. However, this morning, almost simultaneously, cracks appeared in all four areas and hadn't dissipated yet.

Fortunately, those dispatched for security support acted promptly and evacuated the residents calmly, so like Charloin, these areas also had no casualties so far.

"Currently, the dispatched members are on standby with support personnel, operating under the assumption that monsters could suddenly appear, just like on the day of the hailstorm."

"Good. What's next?"

Receiving Kishiar's gaze, it was Meghna Kurlieva from the imperial army who stepped forward.

"General Gino successfully captured last night those who had been masquerading as the southern army for a long time. They were apprehended while trying to head to the southern coastal cities. Some escaped, and we are currently tracking them. I've come to share this information for coordinated efforts."

Yuder recalled his conversation with General Gino. Back then, the seasoned general had left, determined to root out the rotten elements within the southern army, unaware of their existence.

'He caught them much faster than expected.'

Yuder noticed the faint scar on Meghna's neck. There had been an attempt on her life from within, and it seemed to be a remnant of that time.

Yet, Meghna had survived and was here now.

Most of those present were people who would not have been here before.

After everyone's reports had concluded, Kishiar, with an unruffled expression, stood up from his seat. The man, standing proudly like a war god in the eyes of those present, turned away from the window and spoke.

"Everyone here has heard from me, after the day of the hailstorm, something that might have seemed absurd. I said that the hailstorm was not a one-day event and that a second, stronger hailstorm might soon come, urging preparedness. And yet, none of you dismissed my claims as madness, for which I am grateful."

"…"

After throwing such a seemingly playful comment, Kishiar's previously gentle smile faded.

"Honestly, I hoped most that my words then would not come true, but it seems that day has indeed arrived."

Thunder rumbled. As his words ended, a somber sound echoed from somewhere in the overcast sky.

Yet, Yuder did not feel the room darken at all. Such was the bright presence of the man standing before him, radiating light.

"Starting now, we will disperse all personnel to the seas of the four regions, including Charloin, as we had prepared earlier. Do not overlook even the slightest anomaly."

"…"

"The previous enemy came from the sky, but this time, I believe the enemy will come from the sea."

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Chapter 931

“The previous enemy came from the sky, but this time, I believe the enemy will come from the sea.”

No one could perfectly predict natural disasters with human power. The frequency and location of monster occurrences were no exception. There were areas where monsters rarely appeared, but this knowledge was merely the result of long-accumulated experience. No great magic or clever mind could foresee danger and prepare for it perfectly in advance.

Yuder, who had seen the future disasters, was no exception to this rule. Since arriving in the south, he had already witnessed many phenomena different from his memories. The current unusual tremors under the sea, while eerily similar to the early stages of the southern earthquake he had experienced in his previous life, were occurring years apart.

Despite considering all these variables and striving to prepare for everything, Kishiar’s words were his will, but if it were Yuder, he couldn’t have stated it so definitively. Convincing people of a seer’s certainty based only on the present elements was an arduous task.

Yet, everyone present nodded without doubt at Kishiar’s words.

Yuder believed this was the true power of Kishiar.

Expressing one’s intentions honestly does not guarantee that the other party will fully understand them. Gaining and maintaining trust in a collaborative situation was challenging.

Despite this, Kishiar managed to accomplish it all in his own way, under the difficult circumstances where he couldn’t properly come forward after the day of hail. Even the doubtful affirmations that sounded somewhat unrealistic at first felt very natural once they were placed on the foundation he had prepared in advance.

Seeing his smiling face, it felt as though all preparations had already been made, no matter how serious the situation. The heavy and difficult task of bearing the faith, expectations, and also the anxiety and fear of the many people present felt not just light but even joyful to him.

‘If I did not know that it was because of the experience of being forced to be suppressed without being able to do anything for a long time, I would have simply thought it was mysterious.’

But now he knew. He knew how thoroughly he had prepared to willingly face the current situation, and what he dreamed and hoped to achieve.

Knowing this, Yuder did not stop the perilous situation where the one leading everyone should be the first to step forward. He remembered clearly how he had recently suffered and recovered from a serious injury, yet he allowed it.

It was not out of optimistic belief that he would not be harmed or in danger. Kishiar probably harbored similar thoughts towards Yuder but remained silent, likely for the same reasons.

They both knew the importance of this day to each other, worrying and fretting, yet not obstructing each other’s path.

Yuder saw Lady Myra El Herne leaving to protect and guard her people, and Meghna quickly moving ahead to report to General Gino. Kanna, Ever, and Steiber, as if by agreement, efficiently divided their team members according to their roles and sought permission.

Yuder’s task here was simple. As the sole person with memories of the southern earthquake from his previous life, he knew exactly how it started and where the most dangerous place was.

He was planning to go there soon.

‘The Charlama Sea, the initial starting point of the Southern Earthquake.’

The Charlama Sea was a name given by fishermen to the sea area in front of the southern coastal region centered around Charloin. It encompassed the areas most affected in his previous life, characterized by scarce sandbanks and exceptionally deep waters. It was famously known as a gathering place for rare marine life since ancient times.

‘The appearance of the coast is like a place that traps water, with many indentations, yet the bottom is very deep, and the land’s terrain is low.’

Therefore, as he had told Kishiar before, it was a topography perfect for being swiftly submerged by a storm surge or massive waves. The reason such a disaster hadn’t occurred before was simply because it was a region not prone to heavy rains or earthquakes - nothing more, nothing less.

Due to the long-standing peace, people had forgotten to be vigilant. In his previous life, the lack of preparedness for such eventualities led to many being unable to evacuate in time, suffering significant casualties.

Most of the populous towns in the south were located along the coast. The impact of the earthquake had swept away those places instantly, inevitably resulting in enormous damage.

At that time, three out of the four areas Yuder had identified, including Charloin, had completely collapsed and sunk due to the tsunami, and another, due to its particularly weak ground, had caved in, creating a massive hole that swallowed the entire town.

But that was not the end. Once the coastal areas were in chaos due to the earthquake from beneath the sea, aftershocks would continue to spread to the surrounding regions as if on cue. However, more agonizing for the people than the aftershocks was the onslaught of monsters swept in from the sea and the infectious diseases arising from the injured and deceased.

Monsters from the depths usually had little interaction with humans. But at that time, with the coastal areas submerged, sea-born monsters could approach the land and continue to cause harm.

It had taken a long time to completely eradicate those creatures, which added to the suffering of those already troubled by the earthquake's aftermath.

'Ultimately, everything starts with the great earthquake originating in the Charlama Sea, engulfing the entire south. If that's properly prevented, the subsequent chain of damages can be significantly reduced.'

"Yuder."

Yuder lifted his head at the sound of his name. Steiber stood before him, leading several Awakeners specialized in water manipulation. They were the ones Yuder had instructed Steiber to gather immediately in the event of such a day and bring to him.

"You're here."

"Hmm. So, it has come to this. It's quite unusual for us to move together like this. I hope this old man doesn't slow down you youngsters. Are you sure it's alright for me to accompany you?"

Steiber smiled lightly. His words were casual, but his eyes were serious.

In his previous life, Steiber, despite his exceptional skills and reputation, had been overshadowed by Yuder and never made it to the position of Deputy Commander. In this life, having stayed in the capital for various reasons, including his family, he had not had the opportunity to showcase his true abilities, leading to considerable self-doubt.

However, Yuder firmly believed that Steiber's abilities would be more useful than anyone else's today, even more so than Steiber himself.

"The Commander didn't choose his Deputy Commander based on age. Even if there's a mistake, I'm here, so what's there to worry about?"

Steiber chuckled awkwardly.

"Ah, that's true. After all, with the spirit of our Cavalry united like this, we might actually be safer than the others. Just tried to lighten the mood with a

bit of nervous chatter.”

“Please proceed as we discussed earlier. Nothing more, nothing less; just keep that in mind.”

“Alright.”

“Go ahead. I’ll follow shortly.”

“Understood.”

As Steiber hurried off with the members skilled in water manipulation, Yuder approached Kishiar.

“Commander.”

“Have you sent Steiber ahead?”

“Yes.”

The man, knowing where Yuder was headed without needing to be told, smiled.

“Good. Then let’s complete our final checks and depart.”

To avoid repeating the mistakes made on the day of the hailstorm, where everyone moved too hastily leading to unforeseen errors, Kishiar stayed behind to the very end, meticulously checking the surroundings.

He ensured everything was in order - the personnel remaining at the branch to guard it, the situation in the prisons, the medical unit’s status, the emergency dispatch routes, and information on nearby evacuation sites. Only after confirming everything did he finally step out of the branch’s doors.

“Let’s go.”

Yuder followed Kishiar, who walked ahead confidently, wearing the sword that signified his new role as the swordmaster and chosen wielder of the

divine sword. Walking behind him, bearing witness to this new chapter, felt profoundly different.

In the distance, under the overcast sky, a resonant sound repeated as if the air itself were ringing.

Like a call to someone, they headed towards the thundering sound without hesitation, swiftly moving forward.

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Chapter 932

The Diarca Duke’s manor in the capital had been eerily quiet for some time now.

Everyone kept silent, though the reason was known to all. It began after Emperor Keilusa publicly denounced and condemned the fact that the Crown Prince had left the palace without permission. Since then, the atmosphere in the Duke of Diarca’s abode had turned so dreadfully tense that even the chief attendant, who had served the Duke for years, dared not take a deep breath.

And today, Kiolle, the person most deeply involved in this affair, finally returned to the mansion. The already sharp tension in the mansion reached its peak. Everyone watched keenly, wondering what punishment Kiolle, who had been summoned immediately upon returning from the south, would receive from the Duke.

Kiolle, who had recently started to act more astutely, drawing many people’s wariness, was involved in an incident that had blown out of proportion. Everyone thought that no matter how much the Duke doted on his youngest son, he would not overlook this matter.

However, the scene inside the room where Kiolle faced his father differed slightly from what those outside had expected.

“Father, I have no intention of denying my fault. It is natural for you to be angry since I failed to properly serve His Highness the Crown Prince. Even if you decide to punish me… I think it can’t be helped. But before that, could you please listen to what I have to say?”

Kiolle stood before his cold-faced father without showing any signs of being cowed. This wasn’t due to a lack of fear. Even while sweating profusely, he desperately wanted to convey something he felt he must say, shocking those attending him from behind.

‘No way. I heard the youngest master had changed, but… is that really our Kiolle?’

The old Kiolle would never have offered to accept punishment. When scolded by the Duke, he would retort with a pout, ‘I did it for a good reason,’ or ‘I did it for the honor of the Diarca family,’ with a face full of unjust treatment.

Yet here was Kiolle, insisting on saying something even if it meant accepting punishment. Even the Duke of Diarca felt curious enough to ask.

“Do you still have something to say after causing such trouble?”

“Do you remember my letter where I wrote that His Highness the Crown Prince had been behaving strangely even before his unauthorized departure from the palace, likely due to the swindler who died recently? I believe this incident is definitely related to that.”

“So, you’re saying it’s not your fault?”

“No, it is not that. The swindler is dead, and His Highness should return to his normal self, but that has yet to happen, and that is what I wanted to tell you.”

There was a twitch in the Duke of Diarca’s eyebrows. Kiolle, with his fists clenched on his knees, continued speaking.

“At first, I thought the Crown Prince’s experience was so harsh that the cursed abilities of that swindler hadn’t completely disappeared. But the more I observed him… it seemed that wasn’t the case.”

Kiolle bit his lip, then closed his eyes tightly and said,

“Father, His Highness… does not trust us. He is wary of Diarca, and even me, he does not want by his side. He goes so far as to fabricate weaknesses to restrict my actions, and all his behaviors… every single one of them is too strange!”

Kiolle couldn’t directly articulate what he meant by ‘strange’. However, the Duke seemed to already have some guess about it and didn’t inquire further.

“Some knowledgeable old… not old, but a person told me that His Highness’s disposition changing might not be due to the dead swindler.”

“…”

“I didn’t want to believe it, but… during my time in the south, I began to suspect that perhaps His Highness might possess a disposition far different from what we had thought. Considering the future of Diarca, it’s not something we can just overlook and attribute to His Highness being temporarily unwell…”

“You want to say that we need more definitive confirmation.”

“…Yes.”

The Duke of Diarca remained silent for a long time. Then, finally, he spoke to his son.

“Open your eyes, Kiolle. Haven’t I taught you that a person of Diarca family should always be confident in conversation, no matter where they are?”

Kiolle’s eyes snapped open at the noticeably softer tone in his father’s voice. In truth, there had been countless recent instances where he hadn’t been confident in conversation, especially in front of commoners like Yuder, but that wasn’t important right now. What mattered was that his father’s voice carried no anger.

“I’ve already heard about the great trouble you went through to bring His Highness back unharmed on the day of the natural disaster in the south. I also heard that there were injuries that seemed not from a monster but from being hit by someone.”

“…What? I didn’t write that in the letter, how did you know…?”

Kiolle’s eyes shook violently.

“Kiolle. Your father has eyes and ears. Did you think I wouldn’t have someone to watch over you when I sent you to such a place?”

Wouldn’t it have been better if those eyes had helped me when I was in trouble? Did they just watch and listen? Kiolle felt suddenly aggrieved, but he shut his mouth as the Duke continued speaking.

“It all happened because you cleverly hid His Highness, to the extent of avoiding those eyes and ears for a while, and because the Duke of Hern took you away in the middle, creating an unexpected variable. If those eyes and ears had done their job properly, an incident like today’s would not have occurred… The timing of this incident was particularly unfortunate in many ways.”

“…”

“I remember when you struggled alone, with the determination to protect me from that dead Awakener, wary of everyone in the world. Wasn’t it the incident at the lake that time?”

“Father…”

“Honestly, I thought you had become strange then, but if it weren’t for that, I might not have believed that you were trying to serve His Highness and look out for our family in your own way. Although the outcome wasn’t good, in a way, like you said, this incident helped us discover the rot within, which might not be a bad thing.”

This was, in effect, almost like saying he would overlook this incident because of all the crazy things Kiolle had done in the past to protect the Duke of Diarca.

Was that all? Even more, the Duke seemed to imply, as Kiolle suggested, that he would no longer just stand by regarding the Crown Prince. While the close servants standing behind the Duke exchanged significant glances, the Duke smiled at his youngest son.

“I always thought you were just a child, but to see you’ve grown enough to evade the eyes and ears I assigned to you.”

“…No, Father.”

Kiolle’s ability to evade the eyes and ears set by the Duke of Diarca had been mere luck. After all, who could have boldly guessed that the servant by Kiolle’s side was the Crown Prince in disguise? Moreover, the southern region was already noisy with incidents caused by the Cavalry every other day. In such a situation, keeping an outside watch on Kiolle, who was suddenly whisked away, almost kidnapped by Duke Herne, was an exceedingly difficult task.

However, having seen how much Kiolle had struggled to save him before, the Duke of Diarca felt a sense of joy in the simple, loyal, and straightforward nature of his youngest son, unlike his other children, who were more sinister.

How could he not find it endearing that his once foolish son, who only caused trouble, had grown up so much and was now trying to act in his father’s interests? Furthermore, Kiolle bore a striking resemblance to the Duke in his youth.

“What you’ve said is also something I’ve been considering. No matter how unwell or young His Highness the Crown Prince is, to the point of not discerning right from wrong, there are still lines that shouldn’t be crossed.”

Even before the assassination attempt that had disturbed him, the Crown Prince had secretly endeavored to surround himself with attendants of completely different origins, not those appointed by the Diarca side.

Even after being discovered and reprimanded by the Diarca faction, there had been several incidents where the Crown Prince had severely beaten or secretly killed those Diarca-appointed attendants.

Knowing now that he had also tried to manipulate Kiolle in the south, the Duke was no longer willing to stand idly by.

‘It seems he has forgotten the mirror I sent him to remember who he is. I thought he was smart enough to understand what’s important, but this is how far it goes.’

While the Duke of Diarca coldly pondered this, Kiolle, with a flushed face, decided to bring up the second purpose of his visit.

‘Maybe in this atmosphere… it would be okay to talk about it?’

“Father, thank you. Then… may I speak of one more thing?”

“What is it?”

“It’s not about His Highness the Crown Prince. I was thinking about the recent incident in the south and whether the Diarca family should offer its support.”

At that moment, the previously amiable expression of the Duke of Diarca hardened.

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Chapter 933

“Support? I have already sent it. Are you unaware of the extent of the supplies that have left here?”

The memory of the supplies he had been forced to send, enduring the humiliation in silence due to the Emperor catching him off-guard over the Crown Prince’s unauthorized departure from the palace, still irked him immensely. Kiolle hurriedly shook his head.

“No, no, that’s not what I meant… I mean, although the day of hail has passed, there might be more to come. I’ve received information suggesting that this might not be the end. If that’s true, shouldn’t we naturally prepare a response?”

“Information?”

Duke Diarca furrowed his brow. The efforts of Kiolle to beat around the bush did little to deceive the Duke, cunning as an old raccoon.

“So, you mean to say someone has told you that the disaster is not over, and you must also lend a hand? Who told you this? The disgraceful First Princess of Herne, who even neglects her father’s funeral rites? Or is it from the always penniless followers of the Sun God…”

“What? No!”

Kiolle, startled, quickly shook his head.

“Then where did you come across such information?”

“That….”

Kiolle pondered intensely for a moment.

The information he had was from Yuder of the Cavalry. Though Yuder was a character with a flawed personality, he never approached his work carelessly. If such a man was preparing for an incident in the south, there must indeed be a serious problem.

Even the Cavalry, filled with commoners, did not hesitate to risk their lives to protect the nation. Wouldn't Duke Diarca, a member of one of the four ancient ducal families and soon to lead the entire empire, naturally be expected to step forward?

But revealing that he got the information from Yuder would lead to his father dismissing him without even listening. After much thought, Kiolle finally spoke.

"What did you instruct me to do, Father? Was it not to check on the Cavalry and Duke Peletta in the south, to report back in a manner befitting the Imperial Knights and our Diarca House?"

"That's right."

"I did as you asked, Father. I personally monitored the movements of Duke Peletta and the Cavalry. After the day of hail, I realized that their continued presence there wasn't just for clean-up. Upon investigating further, I discovered they believe in the information I just mentioned and are preparing a response…"

"Kiolle. Are you saying you believe the information you've acquired from them, unfiltered?"

Duke Diarca asked incredulously, a scoff escaping him. Kiolle's face reddened slightly, and sweat beaded on his forehead.

"Of course! They might be rude commoners, but their abilities… I believe they are genuine. Aren't you doing the same, Father, calling upon the Awakeners to replace our family's private soldiers?"

"…"

“If they have determined that the disaster in the south is not yet over, there must be a reason… Right? So, we can’t just stand aside…”

If Yuder had seen him, he might have doubted if Kiolle had swapped tongues with someone else, so fervent was his plea. But he was silenced by the Duke raising his hand.

“That’s enough, Kiolle. Leave it at that.”

‘Has he understood my point?!’

For a moment, Kiolle thought so and smiled. However, the words that followed were entirely different from what he had anticipated.

“Certainly, I did think it odd that Duke Peletta had not yet left the south and was solely focused on the clean-up. I even wondered if he had found a woman to his liking down there… But if your words are true, then it seems the Emperor must have further tasks for the Cavalry, hence why he keeps him there. Hmm.”

“…”

“Then, our Diarca House has even less reason to interfere in the south.”

“Father?”

“Well, this is fortunate. As it is, I’ve been troubled enough with the Crown Prince’s unauthorized departure and the foolish death of that buffoon, Ajihen Toom. If your information about further troubles in the south is accurate, leaving the Cavalry and Herne to it would be to our advantage.”

Kiolle doubted for a moment if he had heard correctly. Yet, his father’s face, calm and cool as ever, showed no change.

“Father, but…”

“Kiolle. When you, still a child, threw tantrums wanting to become a knight, it wasn’t to indulge in fairy tales. You do know who you owe your comfortable and honorable position in the Imperial Knights to, don’t you?”

For a brief moment, Kiolle felt as if cold water had been poured over his head, and he stopped mid-sentence.

“Causing other sorts of trouble is fine. I, your father, can tolerate that much. But never do anything that brings dishonor to our House. Never.”

And the very thing Kiolle was advocating for was what Duke Diarca’s icy gaze indicated as ‘bringing dishonor to the House.’

“Of course, if there is trouble in the empire, it is indeed our duty as a noble house to lend aid. But can that ever take precedence over the greater cause of preserving our House? Everything must be for the sake of Diarca.”

After saying this, Duke Diarca’s thin lips curled into a smile.

“Do you think I’m being too harsh?”

“…”

“But leading a noble house requires such decisions. Think about it. Even on the day of the hail, the only significant loss was the death of Duke Herne. Yet, despite this, the Cavalry received praise, and voices lauding Duke Peletta and the Emperor grew louder. In contrast, due to the poor, foolish blunderer’s death and the Crown Prince’s ignorance of what matters, our Diarca House’s position has become quite precarious.”

In such circumstances, aiding an enemy’s success would be foolish, more so now when the Crown Prince, aboard the same ship, has become more of a hindrance than a help. This was what Duke Diarca believed.

“But, Father. This disaster could be far more severe than the day of hail. If turmoil arises in the south, it’s not just there that’s at risk; the entire empire could face grave danger… I thought it noble to repay the help we’ve received…”

“My son, Kiolle.”

Duke Diarca looked at his son, whose speech was becoming increasingly jumbled, with a mix of pity and exasperation. He reached out, stroked his

hair, then patted his shoulder. Kiolle expelled his breath as if crushed by the weight of a boulder.

“I don’t know who has been filling your head with these fanciful ideas, but it would be best for you to cool your head for a while. Right now, the most important thing is that we cannot afford to see the imperial family’s good-for-nothing troublemaker return just as His Majesty the Emperor wishes, swaggering around as if he has become a hero and the rightful owner of the divine sword. Anyway, if your information is indeed true, I too will have to exert some effort. It seems I’ll be busy again.”

Despite the confirmation that Duke Peletta had become the new swordmaster and the owner of the divine sword, Duke Diarca still treated him as if he were nothing more than an insignificant accessory of the Emperor. This was not due to ignorance, but rather a deliberate expression of the ‘noble’ stubbornness to refuse acknowledging Duke Peletta’s transformation.

No matter how much Duke Peletta might be the swordmaster and the owner of the divine sword, it was still the Diarca House that held sway in the world. Unless Duke Diarca acknowledged him, the numerous nobles who followed would also act as if Duke Peletta had not changed at all.

As if visible things are unseen. As if audible things are unheard.

This had been Duke Diarca’s method of dealing with the imperial family, his longstanding adversaries.

“Ah… Father. Then, if not Diarca’s support, may I at least inquire about the support from the Imperial Knights…”

“Stop talking nonsense. Why can’t you think beyond this one track? Don’t bother yourself with complex thoughts anymore. Just stay in the annex for a while and pretend to reflect. I’ll assign someone to keep an eye on you, so don’t even think about going out.”

Duke Diarca finished his words as if addressing a child and gestured with his hand, signaling for Kiolle to leave. Unable to say anything more, Kiolle

followed the servants’ guidance and exited.

With a listless expression, he was secretly observed by people here and there. Despite the covert and maliciously curious gazes pouring upon him, he remained oblivious.

Kiolle entered a secluded annex instead of his usual room, changed his clothes, and lay down on the bed. It was only then, left alone, that a certain thought finally surfaced in his troubled mind.

‘What… What is this feeling?’

He found himself engulfed in an immense disappointment and shock, the likes of which he couldn’t even comprehend himself.

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Chapter 934

Before departing from the south, he last encountered Yuder. What had he proclaimed then? He had boasted loudly that he, too, was a knight of this empire and could legitimately receive support from his family and the imperial knights.

And what had been Yuder's response to that?

"Do you think the Imperial Knights, the Crown Prince, and your father would readily help if they heard news of a crisis in the south?"

His cynical reply wasn't born out of a mere desire to contradict whatever Kiolle said. It was as if he had foreseen the current situation with his own eyes, being extremely objective and confident.

For a mere twenty-year-old commoner, he spoke as if he knew everything.

At that time, Kiolle had simply reacted with sudden anger. He was aware that, unlike the public praise for his family and the imperial knights, people spoke ill of them behind their backs. Nevertheless, he firmly believed that his family and the knights were established for the glory of the empire and that no one could be more dedicated to the Orr Empire than they were.

Until now.

"…"

Earlier, Duke Diarca had mentioned that the hailstorm day hadn't really caused significant damage.

But would he have said the same if he had been in that temple on that day? If there were no damages to the peasants or the buildings, does that make it any less terrible?

Kiolle remembered the surreal feeling he had when watching monsters pour from the dark skies. He recalled the fear he felt watching the Star of Nagran fight fiercely among themselves, the shame he felt seeing the Cavalry members protect the non-Awakeners, and the indescribable sense of injustice when he was insulted and slapped by the raging Crown Prince.

The emotions Kiolle felt that day were not fake. They were not trivial enough to be dismissed as insignificant. Even now, thinking back on that time made him feel unjustifiably embarrassed and terrified.

The hailstorm day might have ended with objectively minor damages, but that was only because the Cavalry members, and those monsters like Yuder Aile and Duke Peletta, were there. Anyone who experienced that day couldn't deny this fact.

Kiolle lay sprawled out, staring at the ceiling in a gloomy shock, struggling with his thoughts for a long time.

'Ah, I don't know. Anyway, I should be reflecting on my actions now, but what else can I do?'

Perhaps his father's words were right.

There have been a few ominous incidents in the empire lately, but as his father said, they always ended without significant harm. Yuder had warned that a new disaster might strike the south, but wasn't he the one preparing for it?

Having seen the incredible abilities of the Cavalry members, he was confident that if they took action, everything would be resolved just like on the hailstorm day. Maybe he was just overly worried, making a fuss over nothing.

"Yes. That must be it."

It's not Kiolle's fault he was here by his father's command. Even if Yuder Aile appeared, what could he say to Kiolle, who had already said his piece and was now confined?

“…”

But as he lay there, staring at the ceiling, images of what he had seen in the south kept haunting his mind, repeating over and over.

The Cavalry members, taking the hail on their bodies and bleeding, were protecting Kiolle, the non-Awakener, from the monsters. Their calm voices asserted it was their duty.

The look in Yuder’s eyes as he firmly stated that neither the imperial knights nor Diarca would come to their aid.

And Kiolle himself, who had burst out in anger at that moment.

“…Aaaah!”

Kiolle thrashed about, rising to his feet. He clutched at his head, tormented.

“Why must I endure this!”

This place was safe. The terrifying experiences in the south had faded like a dream upon arriving in the capital. According to Duke Diarca, there was no need for pointless worries, and no better place than this to live without them. But what was causing these persistent uneasy feelings?

Perhaps due to Kiolle’s loud voice, there was a brief commotion outside the door. Then, a knock, and a servant peeked in.

“Sir Kiolle… are you alright?”

“What? I didn’t call for you, leave.”

“I’m relieved you’re not unwell. If you can’t sleep, the chief attendant asked me to give you this…”

The servants were used to dealing with Kiolle’s antics, especially when he was confined for misbehavior. They knew well what the youngest and irritable young master liked.

The servant brought a stack of books. Naturally, they weren't text-heavy or complex but simple novels with large illustrations. Kiolle saw a valiant knight on the cover of the top book.

It was a novel about a knight of the imperial knights who, on a secret mission from the emperor, travels the world in disguise, embarking on grand adventures. Kiolle had decided to become a knight after reading this novel as a child.

He lay in bed until the servant left, then swiftly sat up and grabbed the book.

'It's a masterpiece, indeed. It's always so entertaining, no matter how many times I read it.'

His mood improved as he read his favorite book. But when he reached a well-worn page, Kiolle's gaze halted on a particular dialogue.

"I am a knight. But not just any knight. A knight of the imperial knights is someone who can only become one after swearing to protect the empire."

Usually tasked with protecting the emperor and the capital, but legally entitled to go anywhere in the empire when needed. That was the honorable position of a knight of the imperial knights.

Kiolle stared at that line for a long time. The words he had shouted at Yuder were exactly those from this book.

"…"

Losing interest in reading, he closed the book, and then noticed a faint red dot on his hand, which had been holding the cover. Seeing it, a shiver ran down his spine, as if Yuder's piercing black gaze was watching him.

Kiolle collapsed back onto the bed. But this time, he didn't thrash or become irritable. Instead, he stared at the red dot on his hand for a long time.

Suddenly, he felt he might understand the source of his frustration.

“…Right, that’s it. Anyway, I’ve already boasted to him that I would handle everything… Now that I think about it, if I don’t keep my word, I’d be breaking the vow to help, condemning me to eternal sleep, right?”

Yes. That’s why he had been feeling uneasy.

In truth, Yuder Aile had never expected Kiolle to be capable of doing anything, nor had he ever insisted that Kiolle must keep his word by invoking the vow. But as soon as Kiolle realized this, his mind eased considerably.

He sprang up from his seat, clenching his fists tightly.

“I am a knight of the imperial knights. What can those guys do that I can’t?!”

Speaking aloud, unfounded confidence surged within him. Kiolle decided to abandon the idea of seeking Diarca’s support and instead planned to sneak out to meet with Theorado, the commander of the imperial knights.

‘The imperial knights are in Seventh Wall District, so there’s less chance of being caught.’

Of course, escaping from this place wouldn’t be easy, but that didn’t worry him much.

After all, this was the home where Kiolle had spent his entire life, and he was accustomed to being reprimanded by his father.

‘In the novels, the knights always wait until deep in the night when they are confined, then escape through the window. The commander usually trains late into the night, so he’ll surely be there tonight. Good. I’ll pretend to sleep and then escape!’

Embracing his pounding heart, Kiolle finally allowed himself a smile.

-

At the same time, in the Sun Palace.

Emperor Keilusa, dining with the Empress, set down his spoon upon receiving an urgent letter from the imperial palace chief attendant.

“Your Majesty?”

“…It’s a letter from Duke Peletta. It seems something new has happened in the south.”

“Ah…”

The Empress looked worried.

“It hasn’t been long since the hailstorm day. Will everything be alright? It’s not been long since the injuries were healed…”

“We’ve prepared until now to ensure it’s alright. We must hope for the best.”

The Empress sighed and nodded. She knew better than anyone that worrying from a distance, where she couldn’t directly intervene, wouldn’t change anything.

“Yes. I should help the Duke and the Cavalry members with what I can do.”

“That’s a noble sentiment, Empress. But I feel a bit left out.”

“Excuse me?”

“Aren’t you planning to help without me?”

The Empress blinked, then smiled like a small flower.

“Of course, Your Majesty should help too.”

Finally, a faint smile appeared on the usually stern face of the Emperor. He held the Empress’s hand, read the letter once more, and then set it down.

“Indeed, I’ve been hearing some unusual things from Duke Diarca’s place. It would be good to share some positive news to prevent him from doing

anything unnecessary.”

The Empress’s eyes sparkled, understanding that this meant the Emperor would use his powers.

“Positive news would be…”

“I plan to attend the government affairs meeting myself tomorrow.”

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Chapter 935

“I plan to attend the government affairs meeting myself tomorrow,” declared Emperor Keilusa.

Emperor Keilusa had long remained secluded, citing health reasons. Everyone was convinced he was on his deathbed, a belief not far from the truth. Though his ailment wasn’t due to a physical illness, his days seemed numbered all the same.

Until now, including Duke Diarca and other nobles, believed the Emperor was near death, so they paid little attention to his actions. Already defeated politically and expected to die without an heir, what did it matter if he engaged in the folly of establishing a Cavalry unit through his brother? How long could such a venture last? While they kept a watchful eye to ensure he didn’t gain too much strength, their efforts were minimal. All awaited the posthumous political upheaval, while the Emperor quietly observed their actions.

In a way, being ignored was liberating. It allowed the Emperor to subtly empower his successors. He did everything possible to ensure that even after his death, Kishiar, the Cavalry, and the Empress could safely continue his legacy.

But then, a miracle happened.

Emperor Keilusa awakened his powers and fully regained his health. Only a few in the world knew of this fact.

Even after his recovery, the Emperor deliberately concealed his health, deceiving people into believing his condition had worsened. He made a point to attend a minor meeting during the announcement of the second recruitment for the Cavalry, feigning a severe coughing fit and needing the support of his chief attendant and knights to leave.

Those who witnessed this believed the Emperor, showing himself after years, was nearing death, no longer bothering to hide his frailty. This coincided with the news that Prince Katchian was investigating the Sun Palace intrusion, effectively burying the significant political implications of the Cavalry's second recruitment.

Just as Emperor Keilusa and Kishiar had planned.

Now, the second recruitment for the Cavalry was complete. The Cavalry, free from attack, comfortably consolidated its forces and now braved dangers to protect the south. Prince Katchian, who should have been cautious, inadvertently caused a major incident, and Duke Diarca was busy trying to absolve himself of responsibility.

In essence, there was no longer any need for the Emperor to pretend to be ill.

Watching the Emperor smile slyly, the Empress smiled along.

"Imagine the surprise when they hear of Your Majesty's recovery. I'm quite looking forward to it," she said.

The Emperor gently caressed the Empress's hand, then leaned in to whisper in her ear, "Why do you speak as if you won't be attending? I had intended for us to go together."

The Empress, startled, opened her eyes wide and then cautiously asked, "But… is it really alright? I've been in attendance before, but only as your stand-in, and in truth, I felt quite powerless there…"

"To say you did nothing is an understatement of your role. You don't need any special qualifications. You've presided over the political councils and persevered without giving up. That alone makes you more than qualified," the Emperor reassured her.

The Empress had represented Emperor Keilusa in numerous events. Her presence felt more like a placeholder, enduring until the Emperor's return rather than asserting her own opinions.

Despite people criticizing her background and mocking her as unfit for handling state affairs due to her lack of knowledge, the Empress endured alone against the overwhelming malice and conspiracies. It wasn't because she was immune to hurt; she bore her wounds to protect those dear to her, exhausting all her strength.

Had the Empress not stood her ground, both the Emperor and Kishiar, prior to their awakening, would have fallen prey to vicious predators, with no chance of recovery.

Emperor Keilusa, known as Keilusa La Orr, had never forgotten this fact.

"Truthfully, I'm worried that I may not recognize faces since it's been so long. I'm not even sure if I can speak properly…"

"Nonsense," the Empress chuckled.

"Really. What if someone speaks ill in front of me? I might faint from fear."

The Empress laughed at the Emperor's seemingly absurd whispers.

"Very well. If you're that concerned, we shall go together. Should you fail to recognize someone, just signal me. I'll inform you who they are."

"That's reassuring. I'll rely solely on the Empress."

The Emperor's lips curved into a gentle smile, one so tender it was beyond anyone's imagination.

The next day, at the government council meeting.

Those sitting with bored and frustrated expressions doubted their ears at the unexpected announcement.

"His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress have arrived. Show your respect."

"What? What did you say?"

It wasn’t a mistake. The Emperor and Empress, dressed in similar formal attire, entered the council room side by side. Solemn attendants placed another chair next to the Emperor’s usual seat, which had always stood alone.

‘What’s happening? We weren’t informed of the Emperor’s attendance.’

‘Is this another of his sudden whims, like the last meeting?’

While most observed silently, a few, looking anxious yet hopeful, were the Emperor’s supporters. As the Emperor and Empress took their seats, all eyes, knowingly or not, turned to the Emperor.

Emperor Keilusa’s complexion was slightly pale, but he didn’t appear like a dying man, as rumors suggested. His breathing was steady, and the eyes behind his glasses were clear.

‘But I heard he looked fine at the beginning of the last meeting too. A hidden illness, perhaps?’

“Why do you all stare? It’s as if I’ve come to a place I shouldn’t,” the Emperor calmly remarked, meeting those covert gazes head-on.

“Maxmun, Unscher, Tagarhan. Am I such a surprise here?”

Those he named turned away in shock.

“No, Your Majesty.”

Though they had rarely seen Emperor Keilusa in person in recent years, they remembered how he was. The young Emperor, once known as a bookish gentleman behind glasses, had verbally eviscerated many with his sharp tongue on the day he first attended this council after his ascension.

Even during his seclusion, most present had repeatedly experienced the Emperor’s sharper-than-a-sword wit through correspondence. Those gathered, capable enough to attend a government council, were knowledgeable in their own right, but against Emperor Keilusa, a man of incomparable intellect and eloquence, they stood no chance.

In healthier times, the young Emperor's nightmarish eloquence, glimpsed through the chill in his eyes behind his glasses, momentarily paralyzed the nobility. Now, the mere illusion of its resurgence caused many to tense their shoulders in a flinch.

"Well, that's understandable. It's been a very long time since I've been here. It's natural to be surprised," the Emperor murmured with an expressionless face. It seemed like a gesture of magnanimous understanding, but it was merely a prelude to the bomb he was about to drop.

"However, you'll be seeing me frequently from now on. It wouldn't do for your composure to falter every time. I hope you'll quickly regain your senses for future occasions."

The implication of his words, 'you'll be seeing me frequently,' plunged the council room into a profound silence. Everyone was momentarily breathless, frantically trying to grasp the meaning behind the Emperor's statement.

Then, cries of astonishment burst forth.

"Your Majesty! Does that mean…!"

"Could it be that your illness has improved…?"

"When exactly…?"

Amidst the chaos, the Emperor simply wore a cool smile.

"A miracle has occurred. That's all I can say."

It was an answer neither clear nor explicit, yet more certain than anything else.

The lazy nobility gasped in shock, while the Emperor's supporters wept tears of gratitude or were overcome with emotion. The most composed among them was High Minister Hebreyina Reiflang.

Though surprised, the High Minister did not lose her dignity. She stood up amidst the near pandemonium, banged the table to calm everyone, and said, “Calm yourselves. It’s unseemly for the leaders of the Empire to behave so rashly.”

Then she slowly turned and bowed respectfully to the Emperor and Empress.

“I won’t say more. We should only be thankful to God that the Sun of our Empire has returned to us in good health. Now, may we proceed with the reports that have been piling up?”

“Thank you, High Minister. That’s exactly what I wanted to hear,” the Emperor replied.

The High Minister and the Emperor then genuinely resumed the council meeting.

‘Can this be real?’

Was that all he was going to say? The faces of those with burning questions turned red with frustration, but neither the Emperor nor the Empress showed any sign of addressing them further.

Immediately after the meeting, the incredible news that originated from the palace spread rapidly throughout the capital and even disrupted Duke Diarca’s residence.

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Chapter 936

Immediately after the meeting, the incredible news that originated from the palace spread rapidly throughout the capital and even disrupted Duke Diarca's residence.

"A miracle has occurred?… Is that really what was said?"

"Yes. Many who attended the government meeting unanimously testified to it."

A person bowed before the Duke, responding cautiously.

"…Huh."

The area under Duke Diarca's eyes twitched. He regained his composure only after deeply inhaling from his pipe, which emitted a hazy smoke.

"So… anyone can make such a statement. The issue is whether it's true or false. How is the investigation proceeding?"

"Until the last meeting, where His Majesty briefly appeared, it seemed that the condition was not good. Since then, we have been thoroughly searching everyone who entered the Sun Palace. So far, no peculiarities have been found. Therefore, we are considering expanding the scope of our investigation to other areas…"

"Not finding anything is not the answer I'm paying you for. You speak too easily."

"…I-I'm sorry. I thought it best to report back with more concrete information…!"

The person speaking immediately prostrated on the floor, begging for forgiveness. The fear of Duke Diarca, evident from the quick response, had completely replaced the careful and deliberate demeanor shown during the

report. Duke Diarca took another long drag from his pipe, exhaling the smoke slowly.

“Concrete information. Why do you think it’s up to you to decide that? If you have discovered something, say it. It’s my job to think. You are only to serve as my eyes and feet, not my brain. Is this simple command so difficult?”

“No, my lord.”

Duke Diarca exhaled the smoke slowly again, filling the space so thickly that it became difficult to see. The person prostrated managed to suppress a cough, staying as low as possible. Sweat from their forehead dripped onto the carpet, leaving a dark stain.

“Leave now.”

“…I will return with more information.”

The person bowed and slowly retreated while still in prostration. After they left, Duke Diarca put down his pipe and spoke to a standing servant behind him.

“Change the carpet and tear out the tongue of that incompetent fool who just left. Leave no loose ends.”

“As you command.”

Even after ordering the death of a man, Duke Diarca’s gaze remained unchanged. His mind was entirely occupied with thoughts of Emperor Keilusa.

‘Could it be true?’

He’s recovered? But how?

The illness of Emperor Keilusa was a closely guarded secret, so even Duke Diarca was unaware of the details. However, there were undeniable signs.

Unmistakable traces that not even strict isolation from the outside world could hide. The sense of despair that enveloped the surroundings of the Sun Palace. That much had been real.

‘There’s a chance it’s a lie. But if it’s true… I must deal with the Emperor first. I won’t even give him a chance to rejoice in his regained life. This time, it must be definitive.’

That day, Duke Diarca received numerous visitors. Those who came to provide information voluntarily, those he had sent on errands, and many others with stern faces came and went.

However, among the many people, none knew whom Emperor Keilusa had met during this time, how he had been, or what treatment he had received. Not even a small clue was found, let alone a satisfactory answer. Although the Sun Palace was always in plain sight and it was believed that the Emperor’s every move was being monitored, it was an unbelievable situation.

Was that all? The pieces of information brought as intelligence did not match in any way. One would say one thing, while another claimed something different. Even those directly tasked by Duke Diarca contradicted each other in their words, claims, and thoughts.

It was as if someone had deliberately disrupted the flow of information reaching Duke Diarca.

Such a thought was absurd. Duke Diarca’s agents were widely scattered across the empire. No one, other than the Duke himself, could possibly know the extent of his reach; how could someone have known and disrupted all these channels of information?

Unless someone could read Duke Diarca’s mind or monitor his every move, it was an impossible task.

‘There’s no way such a thing is possible.’

As he aged, he found himself unduly worried in confusing situations. Isn't it said that unnecessary worries are a sign of aging?

Irritated, Duke Diarca sighed and, for what seemed like the umpteenth time today, filled his pipe with crushed leaves and lit it. No matter how much of the drug-infused leaves he used, which usually induced a pleasant, euphoric state, they were no longer effective. Decades of use had built a strong tolerance.

'Tch.'

However, what irritated the Duke even more was the content of the report being made by the person prostrated before him.

"We tried to block the information, but it eventually reached the Bright Palace. His Highness the Crown Prince was so shocked that he smashed some objects, and several attendants were injured and had to be carried out…"

Though elegantly phrased as 'smashing objects', the implied meaning was closer to a frenzied outburst.

'It's not surprising anymore.'

Even if the Emperor has truly recovered, it shouldn't drive Katchian to such a frenzy. He was already the Crown Prince, and no one could easily take his place. Why behave like a loser just because of that news? A smart person would have kept a low profile, acted as if nothing was amiss, gathered information, and helped to consolidate Diarca's power.

It was rare to find a child who was both ruthless and intelligent and also met all the physical criteria. Who would have thought that he would collapse so easily?

"Such is the nature of those with tainted blood…"

Duke Diarca's muttering dispersed into the smoke. Pressing his hand against his forehead, tormented by a headache that not even drugs could

alleviate, he spoke again.

“Is Kiolle staying quietly in the annex?”

“Oh, yes. He was reading, and now he is asleep.”

“Good. If he becomes too noisy, allow him a brief outing.”

“As you wish.”

“And go out and send this message.”

The servant swallowed hard as he took the small note from Duke Diarca.

The servant, having served the Duke for many years, knew that the name written on the note was connected to mercenaries and assassins the Duke employed for his dirtiest and most dangerous tasks.

“Whether proper information comes in or not doesn’t matter. The important thing is how one acts in the end.”

It was difficult to push the sun off the cliff once, let alone twice.

Even if all the information was muddled and the exact situation unclear, if it came to that, then pushing again would suffice.

Emperor Keilusa, amidst everyone’s indifference, had lost even the last opportunity to die in peace.

“…And I too should visit the Imperial Palace after a long time to confirm this joyous news for myself. There’s nothing more certain than seeing it with my own eyes.”

Duke Diarca’s eyes darkened.

Unbeknownst to him, behind his back, in a vase beautifully adorned with flowers, someone was sparkling vividly, witnessing and hearing everything.

-

At the harbor of Charloin, now deserted as all its inhabitants had evacuated.

Yuder stood there at last, gazing at the dark, tumultuous sea.

‘It seems calm enough for now… but it feels like the calm before a storm.’

The quiet was unsettling, the waves irregularly churning in a manner that felt eerily clingy against the skin.

It was as if a beast, baring its teeth, was crouched and ready to pounce.

“…Is this the first time we’ve stood side by side, watching the sea?”

Yuder turned his head towards the voice that spoke beside him. Kishiar was looking at him with a small smile.

It was unclear how long Kishiar had been watching him, but it was likely that he had been observing Yuder from the beginning. Yuder tore his gaze from the sea and replied.

“Yes.”

“It’s a pity we’re not alone due to all the people around, but we’ll have another chance to see it together.”

“…”

As he said, the area was bustling with people busily checking the breakwaters and surveying the surroundings. Yuder’s reason for being out here was, in fact, to survey the place beyond the sea, where he was meant to go.

“The waves are getting higher, and I can feel irregular vibrations underfoot.”

“Yes, I feel them too.”

“Finding the source of these vibrations and stopping them all at once is no easy task.”

“But it’s something we must do.”

“Yes.”

After that response, a brief silence fell between them. Yuder, looking at the intensely churning sea, impulsively asked,

“People say that the current state of the sea is completely different from the usual Southern Sea, almost like the Northern Sea. Is the sea near Peletta similar to this when seen up close?”

“Hmm. No. The color may have become slightly similar now, but Peletta’s sea is completely different from this Southern Sea. The smell, the air, nothing is alike. Just as being rough is not the same as being dangerous.”

“…I see.”

“Curious?”

“Yes, I am curious.”

Yuder replied honestly. A smile, carrying a mixture of emotions, floated across Kishiar’s face.

“Good. As I said before, I’ll definitely invite you next time to show you. I want to hear your thoughts on the difference you feel compared to the Southern Sea.”

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Chapter 937

“Good. As I said before, I’ll definitely invite you next time to show you. I want to hear your thoughts on the difference you feel compared to the Southern Sea.”

In that moment, the gloomy atmosphere surrounding Yuder completely transformed.

The damp wind became as cool and refreshing as the one they had once felt together in the Great Sarain Forest in the West, and the clingy humidity turned into the comforting warmth of someone who had embraced him tightly on a blind night, bringing life back into the air.

Yuder felt as though he had returned to that moment, sitting side by side with Kishiar atop a tall tree, feeling the wind brush past them like the sound of waves. Although his body was clearly here, just the memory alone seemed to change everything. It was indeed a strange phenomenon.

Yuder closed his eyes tightly, recalling the time when, even in darkness, he could feel everything as if it were in his hands. He took a deep breath, feeling a tightness in his chest, then exhaled and opened his eyes.

A pair of unwavering red eyes met Yuder’s gaze directly.

Perhaps even then, he had been watching Yuder with such eyes.

Rumble…

Once again, an indiscernible sound came from somewhere in the sea. Yuder finally shifted his gaze from Kishiar’s eyes and turned his head. He saw his companions nearby, carefully exchanging opinions.

“Have you figured out the direction?”

“It’s similar to before. Southeast! But I’m not sure about the distance yet.”

“Me neither. It seems to come from beneath the sea…”

The sound, though similar to the prelude of a thunderstorm, was different and had been occurring irregularly since dawn. The Cavalry members, especially those with auditory abilities, were gathered, trying to determine the location and information of the sound each time it was heard.

‘Well, pinpointing the direction alone is quite an achievement.’

Yuder knew only that the Charlama Sea area was the epicenter of the southern earthquake, but not its exact location. Thanks to his companions, the area they needed to search had significantly narrowed, which was fortunate.

‘But considering the sound is getting louder and longer, it seems we can’t wait any longer.’

“…It’s time for us to go.”

As Yuder stepped back and spoke, Kishiar nodded.

“Don’t worry about the rear, …be careful.”

At a glance, it was a flawless and leader-like statement. However, Yuder noticed a slight lapse just before Kishiar warned him to be careful. Those brief seconds were when his almost inhuman restraint momentarily ceased.

Originally, Kishiar had seriously considered joining Yuder in heading to the sea to find the epicenter of the earthquake. However, after the day of hail, he decided to step back first. It was judged that the Cavalry, despite their growth, was not yet ready to handle the absence of their leader completely. Yuder had agreed with this decision.

Their current earthquake response system consisted of three stages.

The first stage involved Yuder leading those skilled in water manipulation to the sea to locate the earthquake’s origin. Meanwhile, Kishiar and those remaining on land prepared for any impending disasters, checking on the breakwaters and other measures they had set up in various locations.

The second stage involved Yuder's team locating and effectively blocking the earthquake's epicenter, while the rest responded to the environmental changes and potential emergence of monsters from the sea that the aftermath might bring. The priority was to maintain rapid communication and coordination, adapting to the unpredictable situations, with speed being of utmost importance.

From this point, Kishiar was planned to join if necessary. The day of the hail had shown that sometimes, his power was more needed than his exceptional leadership.

And then, the final stage, the third stage.

While it would be ideal if everything concluded at the second stage, realistically, the likelihood of that not happening was quite high. Hence, the third stage was planned for situations where Yuder's team failed to stop the earthquake or, even if they did, other unforeseen disasters or crises occurred.

In the third stage, gathering in one place like now would be meaningless. To minimize the damage to ordinary people, the assembled members would have to disperse as predetermined, forming small teams to respond.

The few capable of guarding the rear would take on that role.

'One can only hope it doesn't come to that…'

Yet, having a plan was always better than not having one at all. In a crisis where nothing comes to mind, the only help is the command ingrained in the body and mind.

Yuder moved toward the end of the breakwater.

"Yuder."

Steiber and about twenty members greeted him with tense faces. All of them were Awakeners who could manipulate water or wind, but facing such a vast sea to exert their power was a first for them.

“Is it time to depart?”

Yuder, after indifferently scanning their faces, nodded.

“You know what to do.”

“Uh, yes.”

“Then let’s go.”

“Wait! Isn’t there anything else to say?”

Yuder frowned at the question. What more was there to say when they already knew what to do? The member who had raised the question, though embarrassed, brazenly continued.

“I mean, you know, like those special moments before a mission. A profound statement from the leader… A passionate encouragement to each other…”

Who does such a thing? Yuder thought. But just then, a fierce cry erupted from the side.

“We’re the only ones who can defend this breakwater! How can we let it fall after all the work we’ve done?!”

“There’s no way we’ll let that happen!”

“Let’s go! Cavalry and Imperial Army, unite!”

“…”

Yuder was taken aback by the sudden display of camaraderie from the members and the Imperial Army, who had been diligently building the breakwater.

‘Really? They want that?’

However, the members in front of Yuder seemed genuinely envious, their eyes sparkling.

“…I’ve never thought such a thing was necessary on a mission. If you really want to do it, do it among yourselves.”

This was already a concession compared to Yuder’s previous life as Yudrain Aile, but the members were undeterred.

“What? How can we do it without you?”

“Exactly! To exclude you… That’s betrayal!”

“Don’t make us traitors. You’re the one who gathered us, who leads us! It’s only right that you say something before we go!”

“Yuder. I understand that playing around in a serious situation might feel inappropriate. But it could also boost morale. How about a few words before we go?”

“Steiber…”

Even Steiber, who had been standing back like Yuder, eventually said the same. Yuder turned his head. Not far away, Kishiar was watching with a smile, seemingly having no intention of helping.

“…”

Finally, Yuder sighed and, with a furrowed brow, opened his mouth.

“Just remember one thing.”

“Wowww!”

“Just do as I do. And if you feel like you’re going to die, don’t hesitate-just turn back. This is true everywhere, but especially in the sea where being unable to move on your own means the end.”

After his ominous words, all that remained was the wide-eyed members and a profound silence.

“…”

They shouldn’t have put him in such a position.

But the words he had uttered were sincere, meant for the members to remember. Life is an irreplaceable asset that cannot be exchanged for anything. Completing the mission was important, but it wasn’t a reason to lose one’s life in vain.

Just as Yuder’s eyes darkened, the previously silent members suddenly erupted into cheers.

“Woahhh!”

“Exactly! That’s the spirit of the Cavalry! You all heard it, right?!”

“Yeah! There’s nothing more shameful for those who can control water than to drown in it!”

“Let’s all do our best!”

“Thinking about our training suddenly eases my nerves!”

“…”

The members became boisterous, linking arms and punching the air. Yuder found himself forcibly included in their midst.

‘That so-called spirit of the Cavalry…’

He was exasperated, but since the mood hadn’t been ruined, he guessed it was fine.

“…Now we really are going.”

“Yeah!”

Yuder watched the members respond like children and let out a small sigh. Then he took the lead, moving towards the end of the breakwater and leaping gracefully.

His body, once leaped upon the wind, landed firmly on the sea. The water beneath his feet solidified, supporting his step-a feat only the skilled among those Awakeners with the power to manipulate water could achieve.

“Wow…!”

Amidst the admiration of the onlookers, others followed, one by one leaping and standing upon the sea behind Yuder. He waited until the last person was securely on the water, then turned his head.

Among the crowd on the breakwater, Kishiar’s figure was visible. He was silently observing Yuder.

What kind of farewell should he offer? No matter what he thought of saying, only one thing came to mind.

Yuder parted his silent lips and spoke.

“I shall return soon.”

To those words, devoid of warmth, the Cavalry Commander smiled broadly.

“Yes. Soon.”

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Chapter 938

A group of people racing across the sea at high speed appeared almost surreal, like phantasmagorical beings. This, of course, was the impression from afar; in reality, they were straining to the point of dripping sweat from their backs.

“Pant… Hah… Despite all the training we’ve done on water, this is no joke… We might have to do this all day long…”

“Unless you’re carrying someone like I am, keep your mouth shut if it’s not as hard…”

Hearing the grumbling of a team member gasping for breath, a fellow member chided them. To accommodate those in the team who could only use wind powers, the stronger water manipulators were either carrying or holding onto their teammates. Choosing to carry the wind manipulators, who could lighten their own bodies, was the best method, as it required less use of their powers than running on water together.

“Seeing how everyone’s still chatty, seems like we’re all still in good shape. But be careful, a moment’s distraction, and you could fall right in.”

Steiber, trailing at the end of the group, spoke in a relaxed tone. Even though he was carrying the wind manipulator Yergin Schiller on his back, he hadn’t sweated a drop, maintaining a steady state.

“Steiber is truly remarkable… Seeing him on water, he seems even more invigorated. I’m envious.”

A team member lagging behind expressed their envy, to which Steiber just laughed heartily.

“No, it’s hard for me too. If you’re looking for someone who’s not struggling, don’t look at me, look up front.”

“Ah… Yuder is an exception. How can we compare with him?”

Their gazes simultaneously shifted to Yuder, who was gracefully moving at the forefront, skillfully catching and releasing the water beneath his feet in sync with his speed. Manipulating water with such finesse was a delicate and challenging task, not achievable by all water manipulators.

Among the elite members of the Cavalry, none lacked this skill. However, moving on shallow streams or rivers was one thing; maneuvering on the sea was an entirely different story. In fact, this aspect had been the most challenging during their training for this mission.

“In shallow water, if you fall, you just swim out, so it’s less worrying. There are no waves to face either. But this time, it’s different.”

Most of the Cavalry had lived their lives without ever seeing the sea. Steiber was among them. Born in the capital, he had spent 43 years there before moving to the south recently, where he saw the sea for the first time. Before seeing it, he had imagined the sea as just a very large river, but it was nothing like that. The sea tasted salty, as if salt was springing from the water, and was so deep that diving in, one could never see the bottom. Watching the ceaseless waves, frothing white, cover the land and disappear was almost frightening.

Before training in sea manipulation, he had even broken out in cold sweats, doubting whether he could truly handle such vast waters. Though he pretended to be unfazed in front of other members, inside he felt embarrassed, being the oldest among them.

But Yuder was different. Like Steiber, he was from the mountains and unfamiliar with the sea, yet his movements into it showed no hesitation. It wasn’t an act, unlike Steiber. Yuder genuinely did not fear the sea.

In the seemingly endless sea, it seemed as if he could walk across it as if it were flat land, a testament to his tremendous ability. This confidence, an air of nonchalance towards everything, was evident.

His impassive face, unfazed and unflustered by anything, gave strength to Steiber and the rest of the team to move without intimidation even before the vastness of nature. Following such a leader made even the boundless sea feel trivial, allowing them the leisure to chatter.

Of course, if he said this out loud, that young man, as usual, would probably furrow his brow in mild annoyance and dismiss it as nonsense. ‘And then he’ll probably say it’s because we lack skill and need more training. As always…’

Visualizing this, Steiber couldn’t help but smirk.

It was then that Yuder slowed down and turned his head.

“Start the search in this area. Get ready.”

“Oh, here?”

Looking around, there seemed to be no significant difference from the rest of the sea. But if Yuder had chosen this spot, it must be the right direction. The team members, without any doubt, began their preparations. They spread out at a reasonable distance, and those carrying wind manipulators on their backs passed them to nearby members.

Steiber too handed over Yergin, whom he was carrying, to another member. While Steiber was in the sea for the first phase, that member would carry Yergin. Conversely, when the first team completed their search and returned, their roles would switch.

This was what they had to continue doing throughout the day.

“Steiber, be careful.”

“You too, be careful.”

Amid the sudden surge of tension, Steiber stretched his muscles, feeling the stiffness. Twelve members, including Steiber, had gathered in a circle around Yuder. The rest waited on the water.

“We’ll dive in on the count of three.”

Yuder raised his hand. His fingers began to fold.

Three, two, one.

As his hand clenched into a fist, Steiber withdrew the support of the water beneath his feet. His body was smoothly sucked downwards.

‘Gulp.’

The first time Steiber had submerged in seawater during their training, he noticed how different it felt from freshwater. To compare, if freshwater, like river water, felt like handling a soft, yielding dough of white bread, seawater felt like dealing with a hard, gigantic loaf of black bread, as if made for a giant’s storage.

‘The only thing I can think of is this analogy because the only thing I’ve ever done in my life is bakery.’

Nevertheless, enduring the immense pressure underwater, Steiber wasted no time in exerting his power. The water wrapped around his body, comfortably allowing him to breathe.

When he opened his eyes, they didn’t sting, and the currents couldn’t recklessly approach his body. Despite being fully submerged, he felt no pain.

‘This should be enough to last as long as during training.’

This was the second ability of outstanding water manipulators: the power to endure underwater for extended periods.

The more powerful the water manipulators, the longer they could withstand underwater. Steiber, during training, had managed to endure up to an hour, which was a record among the ordinary Cavalry members.

The term ‘ordinary’ was deliberately used because of the existence of an exceptional outlier like Yuder Aile. He had exceeded the limit by a wide

margin and only emerged because he felt further endurance had no meaning. Therefore, no one truly knew how long he could last.

Surveying their surroundings, Steiber and his fellow comrades, now adapted to the water, exchanged glances as they effortlessly sliced through the currents. Yuder, confirming that all twelve members were in good condition, changed the hand signals.

‘Begin the search.’

Around Yuder, the water swiftly swirled, creating currents. He moved forward into the depths of the sea, swimming-like, and lightly adjusted a bracelet on his wrist. The magic bracelet emitted a bright light in response. Following him, the other team members also illuminated their bracelets, trailing Yuder in the same manner. Thanks to the current created by Yuder at the forefront, the rest of the members could move comfortably without exerting much effort. Yuder, however, faced greater resistance and used his powers more intensively, though he showed no sign of strain.

Steiber, following behind, couldn’t help but admire sincerely.

‘Indeed, he’s remarkable… If someone like him ages and grows even more skilled, just how incredible will he become?’

As they ventured deeper under the sea, the surroundings grew progressively darker. Steiber looked around for any anomalies, feeling a sense of strangeness.

‘It’s odd not to see any fish this deep.’

During their training in shallower coastal waters, they had often seen fearless fish rising to the surface. Diving deeper, the shadows of colorful fish swimming below were easily visible.

But now, not a single one was in sight.

It was as if something had frightened them all, sending them fleeing far away.

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Chapter 939

Steiber focused intently, ready to detect any fish that might come into view. Despite descending deep enough to strain his body even with the protective force, the ocean depths remained eerily calm.

After a while, one of the Cavalry members, struggling under the oppressive pressure, bubbled a breath from his lips and gestured with his hand. The power of water flowing from his hand coalesced like an invisible hand, tapping Yuder on the shoulder.

Yuder turned and signaled with his hands, meaning, “If this is your limit, do not descend further and search the surrounding area at this depth.” He then moved his hands again, ensuring the message was visible to all.

“From now on, we scatter. But, stay within sight of each other.”

Nodding, the Cavalry members glanced at each other and began to disperse. About half remained near their current depth without going deeper, but Yuder, without hesitation, swam further down. Steiber quickly followed, with a few members trailing, but as they descended into the depths where light failed to reach, one by one, they stopped.

In the end, only Steiber was able to follow Yuder to the very bottom.

‘I’m starting to struggle too… Is Yuder really planning to go to the very bottom of the sea?’

It became difficult to discern the surroundings, even with the faint light emanating from the bracelet. It felt more like entering the mouth of a giant monster with its gaping black jaws, and the instinctive desire to escape this place was harder to suppress than the physical difficulty. The other members probably stopped for the same reason.

Steiber, watching Yuder descend fearlessly deeper, finally stopped. He judged that they were already deep enough. Going any further seemed like

reckless bravado, suitable only for the hot-blooded youth, nothing more, nothing less.

Alone, Steiber looked up and saw tiny, twinkling lights somewhere above. They were from the bracelets of the members above. After counting them and confirming that everyone was accounted for, Steiber began to search the area more thoroughly.

The method of search was simple. Extend his power of water as much as possible and look for any unusual vibrations.

‘During the briefing, the Commander and Yuder said if we find anything even slightly suspicious, call out.’

But what could be found in a fishless sea? Traces of the strange crack the other members witnessed? Or perhaps peculiar reefs or currents?

The ambiguity of what they were searching for made the task more challenging, especially underwater.

‘It’s strange to hear thunder-like rumblings underwater. There must be land below the sea, so the sounds are likely coming from there. In this case, those with the power of earth might be more helpful.’

However, those who could only wield the power of earth couldn’t descend this deep. Those with the power of water could reach these depths but had difficulty sensing the land beneath the water.

Thus, someone with both powers would be ideal for this mission, but in the Cavalry, there was only one such person.

And that one person was, of course, now far below.

‘Indeed… that’s why he descended as far as possible. Only Yuder can sense both water and earth simultaneously.’

Without him, how could such a difficult task be accomplished? Steiber shuddered at the thought of being in charge of this mission. He felt truly fortunate to have Yuder with them. Turning his gaze towards the depths

where the young man with black hair had vanished, Steiber could faintly sense Yuder's power from a distance barely within his own reach.

'He told us to stay visible, yet he himself has gone too far.'

Steiber knew Yuder's power was much stronger, allowing him to sense this area from farther away. Yet, despite this, Steiber couldn't help but worry about Yuder.

Despite Yuder's exceptional skills and an experience belying his young age of twenty, he still appeared to Steiber as someone with many rookie traits and vulnerabilities.

'As the situation becomes more perilous, his stubbornness to solve things alone without seeking help increases. His solitary nature, speaking little, not showing when he's hungry or hurt, it's a personality prone to misunderstanding. And then there's that… vulnerability…'

Before coming here, Steiber recalled a conversation with Yuder while reviewing the mission. Yuder had nonchalantly dropped a bombshell, startling Steiber.

"Steiber, I find it difficult to fully exert my power against monsters. So, if we encounter any in the sea, I'll be relying heavily on your strength."

"Uh, what?"

"There's no need to be so surprised. You too have a weakness where your hands become unusable after exerting your power. It's just something like that for me."

Every Awakener had their strengths and weaknesses. In Steiber's case, his hands and arms would stiffen proportionally to his power usage. Luckily, since his water power didn't necessarily require weapons, this drawback wasn't apparent. However, it made continuing his work at the bakery challenging. After joining the Cavalry, he had been able to help out only on weekends.

Steiber was surprised that Yuder knew about his secret training regimen, designed to prevent his hands from stiffening too much. And he was even more astonished by the unique weakness Yuder possessed.

A person whose weakness was monsters, had single-handedly defeated a giant monster in the West, and had continuously confronted numerous monsters in the South, all without anyone noticing?

Steiber couldn’t fathom the tremendous effort required for such feats. But Yuder, as expressionless as ever, had brushed it off as something mentioned only because it might be relevant to the mission.

“Don’t worry, I won’t be a hindrance in such a situation. I just thought it would be better to inform you so you wouldn’t be surprised if I acted out of the ordinary.”

“I see. I’ll keep that in mind.”

As Steiber feigned a calm demeanor in response, Yuder nodded briefly and returned to discussing the mission. His attitude hardly seemed like that of someone who had just revealed a significant vulnerability.

At that time, Yuder didn’t even tell Steiber to keep the revelation about his weakness a secret from others. Nevertheless, Steiber chose not to disclose Yuder’s vulnerability to anyone else. If asked why, it was simply because he didn’t wish to.

Perhaps it was only now that Steiber understood why, on days when his power training was particularly strenuous, he found himself almost excluded from tasks requiring a lot of movement.

Yuder would probably call it an efficient choice.

‘It’s dark everywhere, so all sorts of thoughts come to mind…’

Still, nothing suspicious had been detected. Steiber was pondering whether to go deeper or ascend when, without warning, that ‘rumbling’ started again.

Rrrrrrrumble…

“….!”

When he had heard it at the beach, it had seemed like a sinister sound, somewhat like thunder but different.

However, the sound experienced underwater was entirely unlike that sensation.

It was much louder and much longer.

It felt as though the entire sea, the whole world, was violently vibrating, screaming out. It was as if a crouching giant was about to unfurl, a terrifying sensation like standing on the edge of a crumbling cliff. In that moment, Steiber momentarily lost the strength maintaining his body.

‘No…!’

Immediately, his body whirled uncontrollably in the current, like a leaf caught in a whirlwind. The immense pressure blurred his vision and choked his breath. Air bubbles escaped from between his lips, bubbling out like silent screams.

‘If I lose consciousness, it’s over…!’

Struggling against the crushing pressure and trying to halt his expelled breath, Steiber tightly shut his eyes. Desperately exerting his power to its fullest, the water responded to his will, flailing as if trying to grasp onto something.

Then, something faintly registered in Steiber’s senses.

‘What…?’

He stopped, lowering his head.

Somewhere in the pitch-black depths of the sea.

He felt an unusual current forming, invisible to the eye.

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Chapter 940

He felt an unusual current forming, invisible to the eye.

Yet, when he sent forth his power again to verify, that sensation had vanished as if washed away.

‘Was it really just my imagination? I was sure I felt something.’

The fleeting sensation he had just felt worried him more than his wildly beating heart, which was a reminder of the near-death experience he had narrowly avoided. Steiber cautiously exerted his power a few more times, but the strange current he had sensed earlier eluded his grasp once again.

Gazing into the deep, dark abyss of the ocean, Steiber was lost in thought.

‘There are three possibilities to consider in this situation.’

First, it could simply have been a hallucination.

Second, he might have misinterpreted a current caused by Yuder’s exerted power during the search.

And third,

‘…It could be that I did indeed detect something, but the location where this bizarre current was generated has either disappeared or shifted.’

It was a power he had briefly felt while being swept away, unprotected. There was certainly a possibility that it was a mere illusion. However, after some deliberation, Steiber dismissed the first two possibilities from his mind.

‘It was too vivid to be a figment of my imagination. It lasted only a moment, but… And if it had been Yuder’s power, I would have recognized

it even amidst chaos. I'll follow the direction where I felt that current. That will confirm it.'

Descending deeper would significantly increase the danger, especially now that the light from his companions' bracelets was barely visible.

But Steiber did not hesitate in his decision. He unleashed the power of water in all directions, creating small currents that swirled and darted like arrows, temporarily altering the immense flow of the ocean.

'If they feel this, they'll come towards me. And then…'

Steiber pulled out something he had brought for this very moment from his pocket. It was a spool of thread, made from thin, tangled cords, bright even in the darkness, soaked and dried in a luminous paint. It was crafted by the mage Alik, and whatever trick he used, it remained perfectly buoyant in these deep waters, fluttering at the exact spot where Steiber had placed it.

It was an item meant to signal their location and save lives in situations where magic tools or the powers of the Awakeners could not be utilized.

Steiber laid one end of the thread at his current location, holding the other as he began his descent. Those who felt the signal would follow the thread to him.

Before long, he reached the vicinity of where he had first detected the strange current. There was nothing there. When he exerted his power again for another search, the tips of his fingers faintly caught a similar flow to what he had felt before, like sensing the touch of a single hair. Yet, even when he approached that spot, nothing was visible. The two locations were almost perfectly in opposite directions.

Still, he did not give up. When he exerted his power once more, after a while, he faintly felt another flow in a completely different, deeper direction. It seemed as if the flow was extinguishing and reigniting each time it sensed Steiber's power.

'In any case, what I felt wasn't just an illusion.'

The creation of this peculiar current and its movement from place to place did not seem to be a mere figment of his imagination.

‘What could it be? It’s impossible to guess when I can’t see it.’

Around that time, Steiber realized he had reached the limit of the rope he was holding. As he hesitated, the rope tautened, and he felt a slight vibration.

Someone was pulling on it. Responding, Steiber gripped the rope tightly, and soon, several shadows appeared. It was Yuder and his colleagues.

Despite having endured the tremendous vibrations like Steiber, they all seemed weary yet unharmed. Yuder, too, appeared to be uninjured.

“Are you alright?” Yuder asked, using hand signals to check on Steiber’s condition. Steiber replied with hand signals of his own.

“I’m fine. But I’ve discovered something. Right here.”

Yuder’s eyes widened slightly, then he tilted his head inquisitively.

“When was this?”

Using a combination of hand signals and mouthing words, Steiber explained the strange current he had felt and the process of tracking it. After listening to Steiber’s story, Yuder fell into thought for a moment, then turned his head towards the other team members.

“Did anyone else feel the same?”

Silence followed. Everyone shook their heads, indicating that not even Yuder had sensed it. It seemed Steiber was the only one who had felt it.

“Was it just me…?”

As Steiber pondered awkwardly, one of the team members raised a hand and suggested through lip movements.

“If only one person felt it, could it have been a mistake?”

Steiber shook his head.

“I don’t think so.”

“But if it keeps disappearing, maybe we’re too deep and it’s just a hallucination…”

“It’s not a hallucination. I’m sure there was something. I think it’s better if we all search together rather than just me alone.”

“But Steiber… don’t take this the wrong way, please think about it. Your ability is exceptional, but this is your first real mission.”

Steiber momentarily fell silent.

“Going deeper from here is dangerous for everyone. It’s a bit… to move everyone just based on a feeling…”

At that moment, Yuder created a small whirlpool with his finger near his face, halting their conversation.

“Currently, only Steiber has found something. So, I think it’s better to follow Steiber’s suggestion and search the area. Be alert and prepared for any similar occurrences.”

With Yuder’s words, the others seemed to agree, nodding their heads. The discussion subsided. Steiber indicated the last place he had felt the strange current, and the team members joined him in the search.

However, even then, none of the other team members, except Steiber, felt anything significant. One of the members, skilled in detecting movements in the air moisture, mentioned feeling something slightly off in the direction Steiber had indicated, but that was all.

Their expressions darkened at the realization that even the strongest among them, Yuder Aile, felt nothing. After concluding their search, the team members gathered to share their opinions once again.

“Could it really be a mistake? Even Yuder didn’t feel it.”

“Maybe it’s best to split up like before…”

“Steiber. You didn’t feel it this time either, right?”

Steiber, who had been continuously concentrating to maximize his detection, looked troubled.

“…This time I felt it a bit lower down…”

“Lower down? Even deeper from here?”

The team members were alarmed. Below their current position, the pressure was so immense that a momentary lapse in maintaining their protective power could literally crush their bodies.

Even now it was dangerous, but what if they felt the same vibration as before, deeper down? And what if they lost their protective power in that situation?

“Going down further on such uncertain clues… seems too risky,” one of them remarked.

“Steiber, you said you lost your protective power earlier. Could your condition be affecting your perception?” another suggested.

Steiber was beginning to doubt himself.

“Even if everything else is uncertain, Yuder’s silence is telling… Am I just imagining things? It might be better to conclude it’s a hallucination now and return to consult with the medical team, rather than risk leading these young ones into more danger…”

“No.”

Interrupting Steiber’s thoughts was Yuder, who had been listening impassively until now. He made a light hand signal, a horizontal swipe of

his clenched fist, a clear sign of ‘opposition’, capturing everyone’s attention instantly.

With one eye shining brighter than the faint light of their bracelets, golden like the sun, and the other as black as the deep sea, Yuder moved his lips clearly, ensuring everyone could understand.

“I think we should act on Steiber’s belief.”

“What?”

“Don’t just believe something is not true because you or I didn’t feel it. Yes, I am strong, but that’s not everything.”

Steiber felt an inexplicable thrill looking into Yuder’s piercing golden eyes.

Yuder’s firm statement, “I am strong, but that’s not everything,” seemed addressed to all but was clearly meant for Steiber.

A thought flashed through Steiber’s mind, as clear as a beam of light - Yuder’s own admitted weakness.

“Ah… Could it be?”

A monster.

What if a monster lurked here, something so subtle that even these team members, other than Steiber, who was uniquely attuned to the power of water, could barely perceive?

It wouldn’t be strange then that Yuder hadn’t felt it. Not because Yuder was incapable, but perhaps because ‘being Yuder’, he couldn’t properly sense it, a fact unknown to the others.

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Chapter 941

Steiber swallowed once as he gazed into Yuder's eyes, then turned to address everyone.

"There's merit in what you say. However, wasn't there one more among us who felt something odd besides me?"

Silence followed.

"I'm not asking you to listen only to me despite other suspicious elements. Just this once, will you trust me and go down? There's definitely something below. If we find nothing this time, I promise I won't say another word."

The massive tremors they had felt undoubtedly originated from beneath the sea. Descending was dangerous, but it was a necessary course of action. Steiber emphasized this point, then raised his hand to his chest, spreading and then closing three fingers tightly.

Because of the occasion, he wasn't wearing his usual hat and uniform coat, but under normal circumstances, that area would bear buttons engraved with the logo of the Cavalry, a symbol of their organization. The three fingers he raised there were a simple hand signal symbolizing the three divisions of the Cavalry.

"We are the Cavalry."

The hand signal, filled with a heartfelt plea not to forget that they were about to face an unprecedented unknown, led the members to exchange glances.

"What should we do…"

Those unsure of their next move naturally looked towards Yuder, their reliable figure. Yuder nodded as if he had been waiting for this moment.

“I will follow.”

One by one, other members of the Cavalry made up their minds.

“Alright. I will follow too.”

“Me too.”

Once everyone agreed to follow Steiber’s suggestion, the next steps were taken swiftly. “Steiber, guide me from your side. I will move in the direction you indicate,” Yuder said as he approached Steiber, invoking the power of water. The water touched by his power became momentarily gentler, significantly easing the pressure that even at its mildest felt suffocating. It was clear that Yuder had enveloped them all in his protective embrace.

“Understood.”

Steiber pointed in the direction and they began swimming shoulder to shoulder.

During the descent, Steiber finally relaxed his expression, which he had been maintaining with effort, and glanced sideways at Yuder.

‘Ha, this is something.’

Had Yuder not spoken earlier, Steiber might not have been able to argue so strongly. The others’ concerns were valid, and even Steiber had struggled to maintain confidence in himself. How could he have been so resolutely convincing?

‘What was I thinking, being so fearless… if I really sensed something wrong…’

Yet, strangely, his heart fluttered at the fact that Yuder, whom everyone relied on, had shown unconditional trust in Steiber’s abilities, and he found himself clenching his lips tightly.

‘I thought I was past the age of being moved by someone taking my side…’

But how could he not be? Age was irrelevant when feeling such trust and wanting to reciprocate it.

Steiber decided to completely erase any concerns about being less experienced than others on his first mission from his mind. Now that Yuder, facing a difficult situation, had assumed the burden and responsibility with him, expressing trust, Steiber's failure would no longer be his alone.

'This is my only chance. I can't let down our Commander's assistant, who trusts me. This time… I will definitely find it.'

Steiber's eyes hardened with determination. In that moment of firm resolve, his power, always as gentle and calm as water, eagerly responded. A massive whirl of energy, several times more powerful than before, surged intensely around his body.

Those sensitive to energy could see the markedly increased strength of it, and Yuder, standing right beside him, observed with his golden eyes, shining clearly.

'I'm glad Steiber understood my words well.'

In truth, Yuder wasn't feeling as burdened as Steiber might have thought. This was true even when Steiber sensed something that others, including Yuder, had not.

'If monsters are involved, it's possible.'

Yuder had never been this deep in the sea in his previous life, but he had faced monsters that emerged from the water. The monsters from the Southern Earthquake, all adept at hiding their presence like dissolving into the water, were notoriously hard to detect with ordinary abilities.

And the one who had played a significant role in sensing and capturing those monsters was none other than Steiber Rendley, now beside him.

"He was remarkable."

Back then, Steiber was one of the few original members who had stayed with the Cavalry until the Southern Earthquake. However, he wasn’t a Deputy Commander or a drinker like now, having declined Yuder’s offer to become his Deputy Commander. After Kishiar’s death, it was surprising enough that Steiber remained with the Cavalry, so Yuder didn’t dwell much on his refusal.

Steiber, seemingly present and absent at the same time as a regular member, was dispatched to the South during the flood crisis caused by the Southern Earthquake. There, he exhibited exceptional prowess, aiding in rescuing cities and villages engulfed by giant waves and detecting and dealing with numerous monsters emerging from the sea.

Without him, it would have been difficult to mitigate the damage in the South to such an extent while Yuder was detained by the greedy nobles in the capital.

However, even with his remarkable aquatic abilities, as a regular member, Steiber faced limitations. This led to a rift between him and the members in charge of the Cavalry’s southern branch, as well as the representatives sent from the capital. No matter how well-regarded Steiber was, he couldn’t magically change the hearts of those who resented him for being an older, regular member, yet acting superior because he was a first-generation member.

Eventually, Steiber, leading only a few members, got severely injured protecting a junior member during a relief mission and had to retire.

It was a bitter realization that had he been with more members, he might have been injured but wouldn’t have been forced into retirement due to the severity of his condition. The leader of the Cavalry’s southern branch at the time, who had clashed with Steiber, added another line to the long list of traitors by fleeing with information before being held accountable.

Nevertheless, the tale of Steiber Rendley twisting a river to save people from the flood in the South remained a legendary anecdote for a long time.

‘I couldn’t see for myself how Steiber performed back then. He was injured and in a coma just before I arrived in the South.’

Still, the reports and information about his actions were etched in Yuder’s memory.

At that time, Steiber had detected numerous monsters that other water ability users had failed to sense. In his previous life, he had spent most of his time in the capital, missing opportunities to fully harness his abilities. Within the realm of water, Steiber’s sensing abilities might have even surpassed Yuder’s.

‘Even today, he was sensing something on his own. With such power…’

Yuder recalled the bizarre ‘rift’ he had seen in his dream and the disturbing beings that were crawling toward it frantically. If these beings were somehow related to monsters, he speculated that the earthquake expected to occur soon might also be connected to an abnormal crack or possibly related to monsters.

‘All I can do is hope that this situation proves my theory.’

Hoping so, Yuder had openly shared his weaknesses with Steiber and honestly asked for his help right before this mission. He only hoped that it would pay off now.

Soon, Steiber raised his hand, signaling them to stop. In the depths of the sea, where even their faces were barely visible to each other, Steiber carefully shaped his mouth to convey his message.

“Everyone, stay close and don’t scatter. I’ll exert my power first, and then it would be great if you could release your power from the same spot afterward.”

“Understood.”

Steiber exhaled sharply, releasing the power enveloping his body in all directions. To Yuder’s golden eyes, it appeared as if a massive whirl was

scattering instantly in the darkness.

The other members followed, exerting their power. Yuder also released his strength, while simultaneously wrapping them in a bit more protective power, ensuring their safety in their vulnerable state.

The sight of their powers merging and extending outward was awe-inspiring, yet for Yuder, the absence of any clear sensation only heightened his tension.

He watched Steiber, clenching his teeth and exerting power until his face turned red.

“Just a little more… a little more…”

As Steiber muttered, seemingly chasing something with the rapid movement of his water power, he suddenly opened his eyes wide and looked toward a certain direction.

“…Got it. Below!”

Suddenly, something writhed swiftly in the darkness beneath their feet.

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Chapter 942

“…Got it. Below!”

Suddenly, something writhed swiftly in the darkness beneath their feet.

Before Yuder could fully comprehend what it was, he shifted the nature of the power he was emitting for the search. The water enveloping over ten people pushed their position in a different direction instantaneously. Simultaneously, something extended out like a lance, piercing the water before retracting.

“…!”

The members gasped, spewing bubbles and swallowing their screams. If it weren’t for Yuder’s reflexive response, born of his long experience, one of them might have fallen victim to that attack. Fortunately, none had lost their protective power.

Yuder, following his training, quickly surveyed his team members who had dispersed in all directions to respond and then lowered his gaze.

Something faintly lurking in the vast darkness. Thanks to Steiber’s power, its concealment was breaking, gradually revealing its presence. However, its full identity remained elusive, even as Yuder directed his power toward the source of the attack.

It was like trying to separate water from water-a vague feeling. As his abilities naturally dulled, losing their sharpness and blunting his senses, Yuder became convinced of the attacker’s identity.

‘It’s definitely a monster, that’s for sure.’

At that moment, one of the scattered members narrowly evaded another attack. The blurry assault had struck where he just was before returning.

Yuder directed his power there, but the attacker vanished too quickly to be properly targeted.

Similar incidents repeated several times, most attacks aimed at Steiber. While Steiber adeptly dodged them, simultaneously using his power to reveal the monster and evading attacks was visibly taxing.

‘Moreover, the members are nearing their limits.’

Their protective power waning and breaths growing heavy, their movements slowed. Already hindered by the water’s resistance, their movements in this deep sea, with its intense pressure, seemed almost dangerously constrained.

The members were moving at half the speed they started with. Yuder was faring better but had yet to fully discern the enemy’s identity. Time was running short.

‘In that case…’

His decision was swift. Yuder moved his hand, adorned with a glowing bracelet, signaling the members.

Retreat!

Normally, he would have ensured everyone’s safety before acting, but this time, he immediately drew upon his power. It wasn’t a situation to spare any consideration.

‘No one has neglected their training so far, so they will be able to avoid it on their own.’

In his past life, Yuder often acted alone, not looking back at others, harboring similar thoughts. But unlike then, when he always had contingencies for those who couldn’t evade, the current Yuder didn’t bother as much.

One might say he had become more reckless and careless than before. But Yuder thought otherwise.

When he couldn’t fully trust those around him, he couldn’t concentrate solely on using his power. In critical moments where split-second decisions were crucial, this distraction had put Yuder in danger several times.

But now, consider the situation.

A fearsome power of water, incomparably greater than any Yuder had wielded before, surged around him. Yuder swiftly removed the bracelet he was wearing on his arm and threw it downwards, directing his power at it with a forceful release.

Gruuuuum…

The bracelet, hit by a whirlpool-shaped cannon of water, flew off, cracking from the impact. Despite the tremendous force, it had no adverse effect on the nearby members, a testament to their unwavering focus. As gaps widened, brighter light than before began to seep through until the bracelet shattered completely.

The bracelet, worn to distinguish each other in the deep-sea darkness, Yuder knew what materials were used in its making.

Nightstones, essential in crafting magic tools to illuminate darkness, are a type of magic stone. Appearing ordinary in light, they emit a natural glow in darkness-a rare and valuable material, difficult to mine and expensive. Even wealthy nobles seldom used it, considering it not cost-effective. In the Cavalry headquarters in the Capital, funded entirely by Kishiar, these stones were embedded regularly in every wall, but such places were exceedingly rare.

Importantly, nightstones are, after all, a type of magic stone. When placed in a magic stone stove, they burn and emit light. The principle of a magic stone stove burning magic stones to produce fire is…

‘To momentarily exert pressure intense enough to shatter magic stones, igniting them. Once ignited, the fire spreads to other magic stones of the same nature, continuously burning.’

The bracelets they wore, designed to withstand the depths for some time, were not indestructible.

The power unleashed by Yuder caused the bracelet to explode in a brilliant light, illuminating the water.

Huuuuk–!

Although the surroundings momentarily heated up as if boiling, it was bearable.

Before the light from the explosion faded, Yuder clearly saw something lurking below in the illuminated depths.

‘If my abilities weaken and I cannot see, then I shall use my eyes.’

The very end of the deep sea, unexplored even by Yuder. The true bottom of the ocean faintly visible far below.

Beneath the shimmering light, what revealed itself was…

‘…A valley, no. Is that… a crack?’

A dark and profound shadow lay at the bottom of the deep sea.

Initially, it seemed like a valley due to its enormity. But upon closer inspection, its shape was somewhat peculiar.

Yuder’s eyes flickered momentarily with tension.

He wasn’t mistaken. What he had thought to be a valley was actually several colossal cracks, lying dormant at the very bottom of the sea. Though they appeared small from this distance, up close, each fissure was vast enough to swallow them all without a trace.

It looked as if a giant hand had repeatedly sliced through the water, leaving long trails like cuts. From it, long, transparent tentacle-like appendages faintly emerged, wavering.

‘Is that the monster Steiber sensed…?’

What had he just witnessed?

Before he could fully comprehend it, another tremendous vibration emanated from below.

Rumbling…

Simultaneously, before he could get a better look at it, the light from the shattered bracelet rapidly dimmed.

‘Damn it.’

As expected, Yuder had thought the light would last much longer, but due to the vibration, its consumption was alarmingly rapid. Even so, creating fire outright in these waters was impossible. Using the power of fire underwater would only result in boiling water, as seen in the aftermath of the stone burning, but this time, even hotter.

While it was possible to disregard the opposing nature of these forces and use them if necessary, whether now was the right time was uncertain.

The largest and most unusual cracks he had ever seen. The monster, of which he had barely grasped a glimpse. Should he retreat? Or should he advance alone?

In the midst of these fleeting thoughts, a small object flew towards Yuder and tapped his shoulder. Reacting reflexively, he caught it and saw that it was a bracelet, similar to the one he had just thrown.

Turning his head, he saw Steiber waving his hand and signaling intensely.

“Use it!”

“…”

Since gaining his Eye of Magic, Yuder could see more in the darkness than before, but the other members couldn’t. Without the bracelets, they were

unable to properly recognize each other here.

That was why Yuder hadn’t bothered to look for any bracelets other than his own.

Was it right for him, who had Eye of Magic and could descend deeper than anyone for the search, yet only managed to discern something with Steiber’s help, to make a choice that could endanger his team? Looking at the bracelet, Yuder sent a signal back to Steiber, intending to return it. However, Steiber, as if he had anticipated this, shook his head without a moment’s hesitation, mouthing his words clearly.

“We can’t see, but you can! That’s enough! Use it! You need it!”

He moved away from Yuder, proving he had no intention of taking it back. While Yuder looked at him, bewildered, another bracelet struck him on the back of his head. Catching it, he saw it was from another member.

The member seemed slightly startled that his aim had failed, hitting Yuder’s head, but, undeterred, he gestured just like Steiber.

“Use mine too!”

Before Yuder could respond, another bracelet flew in from a different direction. Then a fourth, and a fifth, until several bracelets, imbued with the power of water, floated around him.

“Yuder!”

“Use this as well!”

“And mine!”

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Chapter 943

Yuder, filled with tension, observed the eyes of his fellow Cavalry members and thought to himself,

‘…I’m sure in situations like this, they were taught to prioritize their own safety.’

No one pointed out that Yuder had failed to detect the anomaly and the monster faster than Steiber, nor did anyone urge him to retreat. They all seemed eager to assist Yuder, with no one appearing to have the intention of fleeing from there.

What is this? It was truly strange.

He didn’t recall ever teaching them this.

The light from the bracelet faded completely, and darkness returned. Yuder slowly closed and then opened his eyes, which seemed to harbor darkness deeper than the surrounding shadows. He then scanned the orbiting bracelets, grasped them in one hand, and, mustering his strength, hurled them downward.

Thud.

A bracelet exploded underwater, emitting a burst of light.

Yuder reexamined the anomaly he had spotted earlier. There were a total of six massive cracks on the seabed.

Thud, thud, thud.

Several bracelets exploded one after another deeper below, illuminating the area.

Yuder focused intently on the transparent tentacles crouched within the cracks. They didn’t resemble the smooth limbs of a cephalopod, but rather appeared as tangled, elongated ropes. His eye, shining golden, intensified their glow, rapidly expanding his field of vision. Despite the sensation of his eyes almost popping out and a sudden wave of dizziness, Yuder persevered, furrowing his brows slightly and causing another bracelet to explode.

Thud.

He began to understand why the tentacles resembled ropes.

Thud.

Inside them, there was a multitude of things. Long hair. Squishy mucus. Protrusions resembling bones. Clumps of something indiscernible as scales or skin. An indescribable mishmash of garbage, if combined like clay, could form such a shape…

Thud.

Although colorless, they were all alive, writhing independently as if they could move on their own volition if severed.

A chill ran down his spine as they dissolved into the water, becoming completely transparent and retreating back into the cracks. Simultaneously, something of a similar form in another crack began to stir. It was similar in shape but much larger than the tentacle he had just observed. Despite its vigorous wriggling, it was too large to escape the confines of the crack.

Yuder speculated with certainty that more such entities might be lurking within the cracks. Perhaps the tentacle wasn’t originally in that form, but had become entangled and hardened, resulting in its current state, much like dough made from forcibly combined disparate materials.

They writhed intensely, then receded, only to struggle again to break free. Each time they thrashed, the dark cracks trembled faintly as if they were about to tear, akin to someone failing to escape through a narrow door and

pushing against it violently. The vibrations mingled with the waves, resonating against the skin before fading. They were much weaker than the tremor that had almost blasted them all away earlier, yet strong enough to generate currents comparable to the ones they had felt during their descent.

‘…’

Thud…

Finally, the explosion of the last bracelet released by Yuder came to an end.

In the light emitted by it, the creatures lurking within the vast cracks maintained a momentary silence.

Then, suddenly,

Rumble…! Roar…!

An immense rumble, incomparable to any previous vibration, began. Initially, it was just enough to shake a finger, but soon it escalated to shake a person, then a house, and rapidly grew to a force capable of toppling an entire mountain range, feeling as though it screamed ominously.

Some of the guild members’ eyes rolled back in shock at the irrational expansion that happened in the blink of an eye. The entities trying to escape from the cracks began to collide fiercely, not even minding if their bodies tore apart.

The entire sea screamed under the tremendous impact.

A soundless roar.

No further confirmation was needed. This was the very place that had been generating the strange thunderous sounds from the sea and simultaneously, where the Southern earthquake would begin.

-

Rumble…

“Ah!”

“Everyone, brace yourselves!”

Another tremendous vibration began from beyond the surface. Unlike the previous ominous rumble, this was certainly different. Some lost their balance momentarily and fell, while the rest clenched their teeth and used their abilities to protect their surroundings.

Kishiar stood unmoved in the midst of this chaos. Not even his robe fluttered, making it seem as if nothing was happening around him. Only Nathan Zuckerman, standing behind him, asked in a low voice,

“Duke, Your Highness, are you alright?”

“As you can see, I am quite fine. It’s those below that worry me.”

Muttering, the man turned his gaze towards the distant sea.

‘Has it begun?’

Yuder’s face, who had intended to stop the earthquake before it started if possible, came to mind. Wherever he was now, he would be using his strength closest to the source of this vibration for that goal.

Even now, just a mere aftermath was enough to knock people over here, far more dangerous at the front lines.

‘One can only hope he’s alright.’

But that was something he couldn’t confirm at the moment. The man knew better than anyone that his duty now was to attend to matters at hand rather than worry.

He turned his gaze away from the sea and spoke.

“How about the breakwater? Are the buildings safe?”

“Yes! They’re intact!”

“We’ve received word that the evacuation sites are also safe!”

The Cavalry members had deployed their abilities at key points throughout the city. They were trained to signal each other immediately if any problems arose. Thanks to this, the scattered members across the city were able to ascertain each other’s status in just a few minutes.

Kishiar, reassured that no issues had arisen, lightly exerted his power. Those who couldn’t stand properly due to the vibrations now stood as if supported by something.

“Oh… Whoa.”

Kishiar had not yet fully revealed the nature of his Awakener’s power to the outside world. Still, the members who knew the Commander had used his power bowed and greeted him with uplifted faces.

“Be careful.”

“Thank you!”

Kishiar passed by them and walked on. His destination was a forest not too far from the breakwater.

Originally, there were hardly any proper trees there, let alone a forest. The peculiar geography, close to the sea yet near the desert, always resulted in a scarcity of green vegetation in the south.

However, just a few days ago, near the port of Charloin, an astonishing number of trees began to grow. Initially small, these trees had now reached several meters in height, forming what looked like a giant green wall when viewed from a distance.

The one who created this unbelievable scene was, of course, Marin, who had received a special mission directly from Yuder.

“Marin. Have the trees fully grown now?”

“Ah, have you arrived?”

Startled, Marin, who had been perched atop a tall tree, jumped down. After a slightly awkward greeting, she began her report.

“As you can see… Yes, they have grown well. They may not be fully mature yet, but I think they are big enough to serve the purpose you have in mind.”

“And the trees in other areas?”

“I finished checking them all yesterday. There are far more there than here, so they should last about a week.”

“That’s fortunate. Good to have everything ready in time. You’ve done well. It must have been tough.”

“Oh, no. Actually, I’m still not sure if this will really be useful, but seeing how the people of the south are so happy just to have trees around… Um, that made me think it was worth doing.”

Marin’s statement about doubting the usefulness was somewhat overly candid, but she didn’t bother to hide her thoughts in front of Kishiar. The Commander of the Cavalry she knew was a rare breed who engaged more honestly with his subordinates of commoner origin, and was not the kind to assert his authority or get upset over disagreeable opinions.

And true to her judgment, Kishiar was not at all displeased. Smiling with his lips curving into a crescent, he spoke.

“My assistant said that your ability is one that could be tremendously helpful to the world. This is just the beginning.”

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Chapter 944

“My assistant said that your ability is one that could be tremendously helpful to the world. This is just the beginning.”

Marin, who had been composed until now, suddenly faltered in her gaze.

“He… said that?”

Kishiar continued calmly, as Marin struggled to find more words to say.

“Up until now, everything he has evaluated about the Awakeners’ abilities has been spot on. Let’s see how these trees, which have already delighted the people of the South simply by their existence, will prove helpful today.”

In a previous game unknown to her, Marin had not created trees that brought happiness to people, but a red field filled with poisonous thorns where no one could set foot. The red field that blanketed the South remained gloomy and grim for a long time, evoking memories of blood-red hatred in those who saw it.

But now, the forests that Marin had painstakingly grown over several days, despite exhaustion, in collaboration with members who wielded the powers of water and earth, were proudly displaying their lush and sturdy presence in various locations designated by Yuder.

“…”

“Then, I trust you’ll continue to do well here.”

Marin saluted in the style of the Cavalry without a word. Kishiar left the forest she had created and headed to another location.

The shelter provided by the merchant groups and nobles, who had been behaving themselves since being reprimanded by Yuder, was now under the care of the soldiers and officials of the Herne family. Their orderly

movements seemed to have a reassuring effect on the people, who appeared a bit frightened but relatively calm and comfortable. The prior advisement to always be ready to take shelter, considering the possibility of a situation like the recent hailstorm, likely contributed significantly to their orderly demeanor.

General Gino's southern troops, dispatched to various locations, were busily setting up protective tents around buildings that appeared dangerous.

After the hailstorm, the priests of the temple, who had faced severe criticism for fleeing, were this time unable to escape and were dragged out to set up temporary medical stations in a few high-elevation temples. Leading them was Priestess Galleum, who had previously helped people without expecting anything in return. She was busily preparing holy water, medicine, and bandages with the Cavalry members assigned to protect the priests. Upon spotting Kishiar, she was taken aback but greeted him with a simple nod instead of making a fuss, her dignified nature evident.

'I'm surprised and regretful that such a talent, despite her connection with First Princess Myra, has been living obscurely in the South. If things go well this time, I must ask her to take charge of the medical unit of our Southern branch.'

It was rare to find a priest who treated the Awakeners as ordinary people without fear. Frankly, it was harder to find such a priest than one with exceptional divine power. That was why the capital's medical unit had yet to recruit any priests other than Lusan.

However, this situation couldn't continue forever. Kishiar planned to establish separate medical units in each branch and recruit people as soon as the second batch of members was assembled.

While Kishiar was conducting his inspection, a large shadow circled in the sky. It was not a bird, but Elpkins, the winged Awakener. Having been rescued from an illegal fighting ring and given a new life, Elpkins had practiced and could now fly for extended periods. Today, he was using his abilities to the fullest, patrolling the area and reporting on the situation.

As he ascended higher, he could see distant areas in one glance, but the danger increased proportionally. Currently, Elpkins, viewed from the ground, was almost as small as a fingernail, indicating that he was flying at an altitude nearly as high as a small mountain.

When Kishiar shielded his eyes with his hand and looked up, Elpkins, sensing his gaze, changed direction and drew a circle in the air. This meant that, for now, there were no major anomalies in the area he surveyed. Despite being human and not immune to fear, Elpkins' flight embodied a sense of boundless freedom.

"Ah, my Lord, you have arrived."

On the outskirts of Charloin, a familiar voice greeted Kishiar as they reached an area particularly low in elevation, a pathway connecting different regions. Hellem, donned in her usual mage's robe and holding a staff, welcomed him. Beside her was a weary-looking Alik.

"Ah, hello there…"

Kishiar turned his head to observe those who were busily compacting the soil and preparing something around them. They were members of the Sapphire Mage Union, previously seen investigating magical energy flow changes due to the anomalous crack in front of the Southern branch of the Cavalry. Their eyes, now more exhausted-looking than the fish on display at the market stall, reflected the harsh treatment they had received since meeting Hellem in the South. So much so that hardly anyone was surprised at the sudden appearance of Duke Pelleta, Kishiar.

It was unusual for a man who usually attracted attention whenever he appeared before people to smile and start a conversation.

"It seems the preparations are going well."

"Yes. We've prepared diligently to avoid suffering from magic power exhaustion like last time. It's worrying how these young ones seem to have less stamina than an old woman like me, but we'll manage somehow."

The mage union was narrow and closed off, with clear hierarchical structures. Sapphire Mage Union, who was fearless when dealing with Awakeners or other ordinary people, could not muster their pride in front of Alik, an elite from the Pearl Tower, and Hellem, whom Alik revered as a mentor.

Whatever her past, Hellem's prowess in water magic at her age, her immense knowledge displayed in debates with younger mages, and the legendary feats she performed with Alik on the day of the hailstorm had all left a significant impact.

After the hailstorm, when she suddenly called them to do a good deed for the people near the Charlama Sea, how could the mages dare to refuse her invitation?

Moreover, they were already being heavily criticized by the people of Charloin for selfishly hiding away during the hailstorm. In a way, they were brought here on a similar path as the priests who were now running the treatment centers.

The task Hellem and Alik assigned to the mages was the creation of magic devices. The poison extracted from the long-tailed monster Penpen, refined by Hellem, and the burglary prevention mist sprayers modified by Alik, resulted in devices capable of detecting enemies within a certain range and spraying poison.

'A single droplet of poison in each device might seem insignificant, but in water, even a droplet can have a greater effect than expected.'

In essence, these devices were created to filter out monsters that might emerge from the water if the area became flooded.

Affected by Penpen's poison, one's skin turns dark, momentarily dulling their movements. Even the most stealthy monsters, once their color changes due to the poison, become easier to counter.

Naturally, it was Yuder Aile who had facilitated the conception of this countermeasure. He had previously suffered from this poison in the West,

spending a long period with dark blotches on his skin and eyes. Had it not been for the urgent accumulation of information about this poison while seeking a cure, this strategy could not have been prepared so swiftly.

Additionally, information about monsters from the previous game, particularly those from the Southern Earthquake that was adept in stealth causing significant damage, and stories about the Charlama Sea were immensely helpful.

Now, hundreds of these magic devices, thus created, were being buried in the vacant land facing the sea.

“I’ll trust you two with this and take my leave. Please continue the good work. And remember, even if the preparations are not complete, evacuate to a safe place immediately if the situation in the sea becomes dire.”

“Of course. I may have lived long enough, but we must take care of the young ones’ lives.”

“Oh, come now. Your life is just as precious to me. Didn’t we promise to live another 50 years?”

“Ah, my Lord. Fifty years is too long. I’ve already lived plenty.”

Hellem chuckled and shook her head, then suddenly turned towards the sea.

“The vibrations have been intensifying since morning. Yuder is over there, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“You must be quite worried.”

“Hmm… It would be a lie to say no, but he promised to return soon, so I’m waiting.”

Nathan Zuckerman, his adjutant, rarely asked deep questions due to his serious nature, but Hellem was different. Her straightforward inquiries were

met with a smile and a relaxed response from Kishiar, who playfully retorted.

“And you, Hellem, asking about Yuder’s wellbeing, seem quite worried yourself. Aren’t you?”

“In my age, there’s nothing as difficult and enjoyable as watching young jewels blossom.”

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Chapter 945

“In my age, there’s nothing as difficult and enjoyable as watching young jewels blossom.”

Without any embarrassment, Hellem openly expressed her interest in Yuder.

“I may not be as old as you, Hellem, but I too find great joy in that. I understand. For someone of my assistant’s stature, he would certainly be the finest jewel, the finest flower.”

“Really now. I don’t recall teaching anyone to be so overprotective. You’ve completely fallen for him.”

“Hahaha. So, is that strange?” Kishiar asked, tilting his head.

“Good heavens. Are you comparing me to those who cry as if the world has turned upside down just because men danced together in the imperial palace? As I’ve always said, as long as my lord is happy, that’s all that matters to me.”

“Indeed. Hellem, you’re the one who said even if I stood on my head and circled around Peletta Castle, you’d find it amusing. Hearing you say that eases my mind. Thank you.”

At Kishiar’s jest, Hellem smiled silently.

“Anyway, it was because of you my lord that I started paying attention to that child… But now, the more I observe, the more astonishing I find him. Where could such a capable person have come from… I wonder where he grew up and who taught him.”

“Haha.”

“I was hoping for a hint, but it seems even I’m not worthy of an answer. Very well, I won’t ask further.”

As the former head of a great organization like the Imperial Court Mage and a long-time close associate of the Duke of Peletta, Hellem noticed things others didn't. She was intrigued by Yuder's abilities, but she was most astonished by how skillfully and systematically he managed and nurtured the entire Cavalry.

Whether it's management or training, it requires more rich experience than genius talent. Yet, Yuder Aile the Awakener, who didn't even exist in the world until two years ago, adeptly managed the Awakeners, considering their unique characteristics, and even developed and taught training methods specifically for them.

He adeptly hid behind Kishiar and acted as if representing his will, which made it seem like his actions were Kishiar's intentions. However, Hellem soon realized that wasn't the case, having been by Kishiar's side, watching and working together since Kishiar was a child and personally raising the Peletta Knights.

Initially, Hellem even thought Yuder was merely representing Kishiar's will, so similar were their ways of handling matters in some respects. Yet, in other ways, there were many aspects that felt entirely different.

It's as if, in ways Kishiar wouldn't, Yuder handled things in a Kishiar-like manner. If Hellem had seen Yuder elsewhere first, he might have suspected Kishiar had picked him up somewhere and secretly taught him.

For this reason, Hellem was convinced that Yuder was not just a simple peasant from the countryside as known. Many saw his confidence as the presumptuous pride of a suddenly risen commoner, but to Hellem, it was certainly not arrogance. She was genuinely curious about the background of this young man, but it seemed the lord had no intention of revealing it to anyone.

"Anyway, I hope he returns safely, having made a promise with my lord. There's nothing more tragic than capable children not returning."

Hellem, seemingly nonchalant, spoke words that belied a deeper sentiment. Kishiar, perceiving this, momentarily shifted his gaze with understanding.

“Ah… now that I think about it, my calling you to the south must have made you miss your family’s memorial day. I am sorry.”

“I didn’t speak for an apology. You know well that it’s about a worthless mother, a worthless mother-in-law, and a worthless grandmother who never even properly visited the grave once.”

“Still, I know you always went to the mountain alone around that time every year.”

“For monster research, that’s all.”

“Yes, that too, but…”

“Please don’t worry about it. If you truly feel sorry, then please think that doing meaningful work for the people would be what my son and daughter-in-law would have preferred, as they were such people.”

Hellem shook her head, her answer clear and refreshing. Her eyes, though bearing an everlasting deep scar, did not wallow in it but healed it into a noble scar.

Kishiar remained silent for a moment, then let out a low chuckle.

“Oddly enough, I’m really glad you raised me.”

“If you say so, both the late Emperor and Empress would feel slighted.”

“Hmm, knowing them as their child, they weren’t narrow-minded. I believe they would strongly agree with my words.”

“So you say…”

Just as Hellem was about to speak further, suddenly, the ground beneath them began to tremble once more. This tremor was stronger than the previous one, which had already caused people to stumble. The intense shaking seemed to come from deep underground, and the dark waves of the distant sea ominously churned.

“Aaah!”

The mages burying the magic devices screamed in terror. Kishiar reached out to support the staggering Hellem and simultaneously exerted his power to ensure the magic devices didn’t malfunction, quickly surveying the surroundings.

“Nathan!”

Not far away, Nathan Zuckerman unsheathed his sword, ready to react to any unforeseen circumstances. Even leaning on Kishiar, Hellem, though struggling, raised her voice powerfully.

“Alik! Stop panicking and cover the gear with a tarp, then lie down!”

“Ah, yes, Mage Hellem!”

“The rest of you, don’t force yourselves to stand! Be careful not to trigger an explosion of the magic devices and protect your heads by lying down! Wouldn’t you do the same during an experiment if a device exploded next to you? Follow the safety protocols for magic device installation!”

“Yes!”

Thanks to Hellem’s commanding shout, befitting a former leader, the mages quickly regained their composure and responded.

The earthquake, originating from the sea, did not subside easily for a long while but eventually began to wane. One of the improperly buried magic devices nearly sprayed poison due to the shock, but thanks to the quick reaction and cooperation of Kishiar and Nathan Zuckerman, no one was harmed.

It was uncertain what had happened near the violently shaken sea, but thankfully, the water did not reach their relatively distant location.

“Phew… we survived.”

After the earthquake subsided, one of the mages lifted his head and murmured. Kishiar made eye contact with Nathan Zuckerman and straightened up. Almost simultaneously, someone not far away called out to them.

“Commander!”

The figure who landed on the ground was Elpkins, who had been flying in the sky earlier. With a tense face and furrowed brows, he saluted and spoke.

“Thank goodness you are safe!”

“It doesn’t seem like you came to help, what’s the matter?”

“Yes! I received a call from the side with the breakwater. Someone might have returned from the sea.”

“From the sea?”

It had been about an hour since Yuder had gone to the sea. While it was possible for Yuder to return, it was also about time for the other members, drained of their strength, to come back. However, if they had merely returned for a rest, they wouldn’t have summoned the Commander. Kishiar nodded promptly in response.

“Understood. I’ll head there right away.”

“Yes! I will relay that.”

Elpkins took to the air again.

“I had planned to inspect other areas, but it seems I must end this here and return. Be careful, Hellem.”

“That would be wise. Whatever is in that sea, it doesn’t bode well.”

Hellem shook her head.

“If Mick was here, we might have been able to see what’s there. It’s ironic - he’s so noisy when he’s around, yet his absence is felt at times like this.”

“I had already summoned him earlier for that reason. He’s in another country, so even if he leaves immediately, it will take some time to arrive. I just hope all this is over by then.”

“Ah, so you did call him. Tsk. That guy should rush over without even sleeping if the lord calls, unless he’s delayed by drinking or lazing around…”

Kishiar faintly smiled at the corner of his lips.

“Even if he comes, he might not see anything, so don’t worry too much.”

“You’re too lenient, my lord. Anyway, please be careful. If I hear again that you are hurt and lying down like last time, this old woman won’t take it well.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Without a firm affirmation, Kishiar turned and disappeared rapidly along the path he and Nathan Zuckerman had come from. Hellem watched their retreating figures, which vanished in an instant despite not seeming to move hurriedly, and sighed with a worried look.

“Is something really about to happen…”

-

“Commander!”

Upon returning to the vicinity of the breakwater, Kishiar spotted several members gathered in one place. As soon as he approached, the members noticed him and called out.

“I heard someone returned from the sea.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Someone among the gathered members raised his hand. It was Steiber, utterly soaked and exhausted.

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Chapter 946

Someone among the gathered members raised his hand. It was Steiber, utterly soaked and exhausted.

No other members who had gone to the sea with him were visible beside him. The same was true for Yuder Aile. Kishiar's gaze, which had scanned around Steiber, turned towards the distant sea. His red eyes darkened momentarily as if shadowed. However, the look lasted only briefly, as if blinking, before returning to normal.

Kishiar spoke quickly.

"It seems you've already found something significant at the destination. Otherwise, Yuder wouldn't have sent you here alone. Have you certainly found the cause of the ringing sounds and the earthquakes?"

"…As Yuder predicted. I alone could go, and you, the Commander, would know everything," Steiber said, managing a faint smile despite his exhaustion. Kishiar's eyes softened slightly at this.

However, the mood quickly turned icy as soon as Steiber began his explanation.

"As the Commander said, near the direction of the sound, in the deepest part of the sea, we discovered six enormous abnormal cracks and a strange, massive monster."

Six abnormal cracks.

And a monster so huge it seemed difficult to escape the cracks.

Even the members who had seen the three cracks during the hailstorm paled at this astonishing report.

Steiber, shivering slightly as he briefly recounted the circumstances leading to the discovery, was wet but not cold. His power over water meant he wasn't chilled; the shivering indicated a bodily instinctive fear from the mere memory.

"All the vibrations we felt, the rough currents, the sounds shaking the earth, seem to have originated from the giant monster struggling and colliding within the abnormal cracks in its attempts to escape," Steiber concluded.

"…"

"The monster became more agitated after we discovered it. Thanks to Yuder's prompt action and directions, no one was injured, but… our time to endure there was limited…"

Yuder immediately gathered his strength to protect everyone from the immense vibrations emanating from the crack. His response was nimble beyond belief for the deep sea. The other members quickly came to their senses and contributed their strength, but after enduring it, most were too exhausted to stay longer in the depths.

Of course, they could rest if they left this place and went up to rotate with others. But if everyone went up at once, Yuder would be left to endure alone, a dangerously risky situation. Therefore, they decided to rotate in turns, starting with Steiber, who had enough strength to ascend quickly and inform the replacements without waiting.

"I had the capacity, more than the others, to ascend quickly and inform the replacements, so I came up first. That's why I ended up here," Steiber explained.

Even a weakened Steiber could move alone without difficulty and quickly at that. It was the most efficient choice.

"So, what exactly did Yuder instruct you to report to me along with the situation?" Kishiar asked.

Steiber fell silent for a moment, his hesitation tinged with uncertainty, knowing he had more to convey. But soon, he opened his mouth to respond.

"…'Balance the scales,' he said."

"…Scales? What does that mean?"

"A secret code, perhaps?"

The members listening murmured among themselves. Kishiar, with an unchanged expression, paused briefly before letting out a sigh-like smile and nodding.

"Yes. He must have decided that was the best course of action. Understood. You should immediately seek out Priest Lusan, check on the situation, and…"

"No. There's no need to consult the priest."

Steiber, wiping the water trickling down his chin, firmly shook his head.

"I'm not exhausted, just a bit drained of strength. Who in the Cavalry would not be after such an ordeal? I just need a short rest and will be ready to head out again."

"Admirable resolve, but this is an order, Steiber. Don't rush. Get examined, drink a restorative, and receive divine power. Then I won't stop you from going back."

Steiber, about to protest, instantly closed his mouth, realizing Kishiar's gaze was fixed on his hand.

'Just a slight numbness… Did Yuder send me here for this? Was he worried about me in that chaotic situation?…'

As if reading Steiber's perplexity, Kishiar's low voice fell upon him.

"To achieve our goals, one must be able to see the whole picture even in urgent moments. Steiber Rendley. You are the Sul's Deputy Commander,

the one who must lead the largest number of people today. Do not forget how important your own condition is.”

“…Yes!”

Steiber rose from his seat, taking a deep breath and shaking his arms with a stern face.

“But Commander, before I go to the Priest, may I know the meaning of ‘balance the scales’?”

“I was about to tell you anyway.”

Kishiar scanned the faces of the gathered members.

“Do you remember, on the day of the hailstorm, two of the three abnormal cracks that first appeared suddenly vanished?”

“Ah… Yes!”

“We’ve theorized why, the Assistant and I. Put simply, it means to replicate a similar situation as that day.”

“A similar situation? What do we need to do?”

A mysterious smile formed on Kishiar’s lips.

“No need for excessive concern. It won’t be much different from before. Everyone, move to the designated locations near the sea, ready to respond to the enemy at any moment. If Yuder’s report and my thinking are correct, the enemy will start appearing from the sea after the next earthquake.”

“…”

“Move out.”

At Kishiar’s brief command, the members swiftly turned and ran off. Steiber, still somber, headed towards the makeshift infirmary where Priest Lusan was.

Kishiar watched their retreating backs, lost in thought.

Not having seen it himself, he couldn’t know the exact situation in the depths. Yet, based on countless conversations with Yuder before today, and information from the previous southern earthquake in the game, Kishiar could sufficiently surmise his thoughts and judgments.

According to Yuder, abnormal cracks appear and disappear countless times in areas where disasters occur. The fact that they appear and vanish without spewing monsters is truly strange.

However, from the information obtained from Aton and his actions, Kishiar became convinced that these cracks were a sign of a ‘disturbance in balance’ occurring in those areas.

‘An overly shocked vessel often cracks right before breaking, much like a scale that starts to tilt heavily on one side and begins to wobble. Perhaps these ‘abnormal cracks’ are also a sign of something similar.’

When Kishiar La Orr thought of the word ‘balance’, the first thing that came to his mind was his own body. Given what he had experienced, this was a natural reaction.

He wasn’t sure if it was right to compare these things on the same level, but when he thought about his ‘vessel’, he realized that balance doesn’t usually distort suddenly. Usually, it wobbles while trying to recover but fails. Eventually, when a limit is reached, it completely cracks, and when it can no longer withstand, it breaks. That seemed to be the order.

Thinking about it, maybe the appearance of the cracks was like cracks inflicted on the vessel of this world?

‘Let’s assume that ignoring the appearance of these abnormal cracks and allowing the imbalance to continue might lead to them bursting, spawning monsters and disasters. If that’s the case, then the opposite effect - restoring balance - might cause the cracks to disappear.’

In this case, the means to influence ‘balance’ that could be surmised so far were ‘power’ and ‘life’.

What had happened before and after the three abnormal cracks in the sky disappeared on the day of the hailstorm?

Several Awakeners died or went berserk, losing their power. Duke Herne and many of the knights serving him also lost their lives. And importantly, the monsters spewed from the abnormal cracks were killed by the Awakeners and the mages exerting their power.

Only after an enormous amount of power and life had been exhausted and lost did all those cracks finally disappear.

Kishiar focused on that very point.

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Chapter 947

When Kishiar considered it simply, balancing something akin to scales or a seesaw seemed most straightforward. He was always attentive to evenly use the four powers within him, striving to maintain their balance, ensuring none overwhelmed or fell short.

It was about expending something to empty and balance it.

Lives and powers spent on the day of hail, followed by the disappearance of the crack.

These two seemingly different events, when described this way, oddly appeared similar.

Hence, the best course of action they could take when facing another day like the hailstorm might not be so different from balancing the two sides of a scale, keeping it steady.

Kishiar had shared this thought with Yuder when he had just woken up from a long slumber following the hailstorm. Among many conversations meant to ease the tension, Yuder seemed to have remembered this particular remark quite well.

How could Yuder remember it so vividly, despite being half-asleep and unwittingly dozing off?

Kishiar’s lips briefly formed a faint smile before fading away.

‘So, to balance the scale means…’

To balance the scales without faltering, one mustn’t hastily remove the weight. Carefully, even if slowly, one should steadily lighten the heavier side while firmly holding the lighter side, to eventually achieve the goal.

In their case, what they needed to remove was not the lives of allies or innocent bystanders but solely the power and lives of the monsters that crossed through the crack.

However, the monster they now faced differed from those of the hailstorm day. Back then, the monsters from the crack were numerous but small, easily managed by even the weaker mages.

But the monster currently causing massive tremors, emerging from the underwater crack, was so enormous that even Steiber trembled at its size.

‘Yet Yuder believed he could handle it.’

Kishiar found the basis for this belief in Steiber’s report.

According to Steiber, the immense monster trying to escape the crack was ‘an irregular mass, as if many things had merged together.’ The tentacle-like legs attacking them weren’t proper legs at all. It seemed like a misshapen mass, jamming its enormous body through the crack’s gaps, with only parts of it emerging.

Others might have imagined something different upon hearing this, but this description was unlikely Steiber’s own interpretation. Only Yuder, among those who descended into the deep sea, had accurately witnessed the monster lurking in the crack. Steiber had merely relayed Yuder’s words as accurately as possible.

While some might unwittingly insert their uncertain opinions or unnecessary details when relaying a message, Steiber was not such a person. His long experience in trade had taught him the significance of words, his nature both amiable and mindful.

‘And above all…’

The Yuder Aile that Kishiar knew was not one to embellish reports or descriptions with artistic metaphors. His reports were always based solely on what he personally saw and heard. Therefore, the description of ‘a form

as if many things had merged’ was not a mere metaphor but likely exactly as Yuder had seen.

Many things. Merged together.

Why hadn’t he specified what exactly those many things were?

If Yuder couldn’t identify it, he would have referred to it as ‘unknown things.’ This implied that while it was possible to identify them, there were too many to specify, making it pointless to do so.

Combining this answer and information led to a single conclusion.

What if, in a situation where countless things, identifiable but too numerous to specify, were merged, they could be separated by their will?

If there was a way to isolate the great monster, bit by bit, into individual entities or a small number. And if Yuder had speculated or discovered this, perhaps it was worth trying the method of balancing the scales, as Kishiar had discussed?

Naturally, it was easier to prepare for a specific, identifiable enemy than for an unpredictable natural disaster.

If Kishiar’s thoughts and judgments were correct, they would find a definitive answer when the monster began to move again during the next tremor.

Amidst the tension, everyone found their places. Steiber, too, had returned from the medical tent after his checkup.

“Are you alright, Steiber?”

“Yes, Commander. After receiving Priest Lusan’s divine power, I feel rejuvenated. I will return to duty now.”

As Kishiar nodded, Steiber saluted and quickly dove back into the sea. His departure was much faster than before, watched in silence by the remaining members.

After Steiber disappeared into the sea, Kishiar stepped forward and drew his sword. The churning water lapped roughly against his feet and the hem of his garment, but he paid it no mind.

His red gaze and the tip of his sword, Orr, were steadily aimed at the water.

After a while, the rhythmically rolling waves suddenly trembled without reason.

“…!”

Lost droplets collided and splashed upwards in the altered direction of the waves. Soon, the water became more violently turbulent everywhere.

Kishiar gripped the hilt of his sword with both hands and lifted it smoothly. It was the starting stance of a horizontal cut, as described in the first page of the swordsmanship manual, a stance once deemed perfect by Yuder Aile himself.

The man paused momentarily, then straightened his back and took a deep breath. His chest swelled, and a dazzling blue aura began to shimmer along his sword blade.

‘It’s the aura of a swordmaster…!’

Jimmy Ocker, watching from afar, swallowed hard. The young boy, assigned to intelligence reporting rather than direct combat due to his age, reflexively glanced at the small sword at his waist.

He, too, could imbue his sword with a similar blue power. Everyone called it an aura, no different from his own, and Jimmy thought so too. Proud of his exceptional abilities at such a young age, even comparing favorably with adult Awakeners, he was quite self-assured.

But witnessing the true aura of a swordmaster was something different from what Jimmy had imagined.

The aura, so intensely concentrated that it wouldn’t be surprising if the sword blade burst, was terrifyingly oppressive, making it hard to breathe

just by looking at it. What would happen if he confronted it with his own power? No matter how much he imagined, he couldn’t see himself winning.

The spectacle of the swordmaster’s proof, shining brilliantly before the sea in such a situation, was ironically beautiful, almost surreal.

The sight of Kishiar wielding his sword, imbued with such a powerful sword aura, was both terrifying and strangely beautiful.

In that moment of confusion for the young boy, Kishiar moved his arm and swung the sword.

Initially, it seemed slower than expected. But in the blink of an eye, a massive aura, its origin unknown, was racing toward the sea.

Boom!

A light, bluer than the sky and colder than darkness, momentarily engulfed everyone’s vision.

Just like the traces left on the Emperor’s sword mark, the sword energy cleaved through the sea horizontally. It was as if the empty water was forcibly penetrated by the sword energy, and at that moment, everyone held their breath.

The sea, which had been ominously churning, suddenly stilled and became silent.

Then,

“Look, there! Something is floating!”

Accompanying someone’s shout, indistinct objects began to emerge on the sea surface.

Small, transparent clumps mixed in the water, their shapes difficult to discern.

They looked like a bizarre amalgamation of all the world’s refuse.

However, these objects were motionless, floating atop the water, each piece severed and lifeless, leaking oily fluids. They had been sliced and killed by the sword aura.

While everyone remained speechless, dozens, hundreds of these things surfaced, quickly covering the sea. Kishiar finally exhaled and lowered his sword, his gaze shifting to those awaiting orders.

Without a word, the Cavalry member flinched, responding to the staggering sight. Overwhelmed by the immense spectacle, they realized that it wasn't the end yet, and gripped their weapons tighter.

"More are coming! Get ready!"

With the shout, the sea began to churn once again.

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Chapter 948

At the same moment, in the deep sea.

Yuder Aile directed his gaze upward, far above where the aftermath of a massive tremor had passed.

‘I’ve confirmed my suspicion, but… it all hinges on how well Kishiar has understood and responded to it beforehand.’

He contemplated facing the enormous monster trying to escape from the six cracks by dividing its swarm-like clusters into smaller parts, an idea that struck him right after blocking a massive vibration just before dispatching Steiber.

Previously…

In the violently churning currents that threatened to tear his body apart, Yuder, having somehow protected his team members, suddenly discovered something unidentifiable floating nearby.

Initially, he mistook it for a dead fish, jellyfish, or a piece of severed seaweed - casualties of the recent turbulent currents. There were many similar things floating around.

Without much thought, he swatted it away, but then a strange feeling overcame him.

The sensation of strength draining from his body and nausea welling up was unmistakable to Yuder.

‘A monster?’

Touching a monster or its byproduct brought a terrible repulsion, sapping strength unpleasantly from the body. This was true even while wearing magically crafted protective gloves. They might offer slight relief, but not

fundamental protection. Otherwise, Yudrain Aile would have already covered himself with it in his previous life as a means of defense against monsters.

Despite only a brief contact, everything about him seemed to disperse like mist, a chilling sensation. Reflexively jerking his hand back, Yuder then cautiously examined the object.

Without his luminous bracelet, identification took a moment, but it was indeed part of a monster. Specifically, it seemed to be a piece torn from the monster that had just caused the massive tremor.

‘Why is this here…’

Yuder frowned, gingerly handling the transparent, mud-like mass clinging to his hand.

‘I never expected to touch it like this… Even with gloves, the texture is unpleasant. Torn off as it tried to escape the crack?’

As he pondered, the fragment in his hand suddenly wriggled.

Before his mind could grasp the situation, his body reacted swiftly. A small shard of a dagger slipped out from his sleeve and unhesitatingly pierced through the monster part, which soon became limp and lifeless.

Holding the now ragged object, Yuder stared down at it intently.

‘…Was that movement real, or just my imagination?’

“Yuder!”

Then, his fully alert teammates, pushing through the surrounding debris with their strength, approached. Despite minor injuries due to the fierce currents, they were relieved to realize there were no serious casualties requiring immediate attention.

“It’s all thanks to you, Yuder. I also tried to exert some force towards the monster, but a slight mistake could have been fatal…”

“Me too. I knew it’s disorienting deep in the sea, but I didn’t expect it to be this challenging.”

“But what are you holding? A weapon?”

Yuder, seeing his teammates halt their gestures to pat his shoulder, mouthed a response.

“A monster.”

“…What?!”

Startled, one teammate slightly loosened their protective force, releasing bubbles from their lips. In a fluster, they got entangled in the long seaweed floating around, prompting Steiber to come to their aid.

“Careful there.”

Silently exerted, the unseen force of water deftly sliced the tangled seaweed from the team member’s hand and then vanished.

Swoosh…

“Thank you, Steiber.”

“You’re welcome.”

Yuder, observing his team members, looked down at the monster’s carcass in his hand. It was a palm-sized piece, squishy to the touch, making it difficult to discern its form. However, upon closer examination, parts of it appeared smoothly cut, as if by a sharp knife.

‘Now I understand.’

It was evident that Yuder wasn’t the only Awakener there.

Yuder had focused solely on protecting his teammates, not exerting direct force on the monster. Had he tried, he would have had to expend several

times his usual energy to achieve a comparable effect. Thus, conserving his strength to prioritize his team's protection was the right choice.

Meanwhile, his team members, shielded by him, had unleashed their powers in attacks, trying desperately to stop the monster. For them, using their strength against the monster was an obvious choice, as it wasn't as inefficient as it was for Yuder.

Typically, those who wield water's power, like Steiber just did, find the most effective attack underwater is to harden part of the water into sharp, blade-like forms. It's efficient, doesn't require carrying a separate weapon, inflicts fatal wounds quickly, and is hard for the enemy to detect, given water's nature. They had been trained to use this attack reflexively, so it wasn't surprising it was their most frequent choice in urgent situations.

Although the haphazardly released power might not have significantly impacted the monster in the deep-sea cracks, it seems that some of those blind attacks managed to slice something off.

An unexpected outcome. But thanks to that, Yuder had an enlightening realization.

'This monster isn't a single living entity. Just because it's one body doesn't mean it has only one life.'

Monsters were unpredictable. Even if thousands of small monsters combine into one large entity, it doesn't guarantee they share a single life.

And obviously, it's easier to fight and kill smaller, separated pieces than one giant being whose mere movement shakes the earth and screams the sea. Even a creature as small as the one just dealt with could be quickly killed with a small dagger.

'What if we time it right and combine our powers to slice up the tentacle-like parts that emerge from the cracks?'

If Yuder focused on protection and support from the back, the force he had brought might suffice for such a task. In his mind, he visualized the team

members coordinating their remaining strength and abilities, concentrating their powers on the tentacles.

Understanding everyone's capabilities better than they did themselves, Yuder knew this was risky but not impossible.

'Yes, slicing them off is feasible. But killing them will get tricky. We'll need to spread out our forces and divide the personnel.'

But what if he stepped in, pushing the sliced pieces to the surface?

If he was confident that Kishiar and the others waiting above could handle them, then their focus here could simply be on cutting and pushing them upward.

Yuder found it easier to manipulate the sea's currents than to personally slay the barely visible fragments of the monster or have his team members disperse their strength to combat them. After all, the sea, regardless of its location, inevitably becomes waves moving toward the land.

For Yuder, adding a little more force to the natural movement of the sea didn't feel difficult at all. It wasn't as if he was trying to create fire in water, an act against nature's laws. If it was just a matter of scale, there was nothing he couldn't do.

Yuder recalled a memory that perfectly illustrated this whole situation.

It was one of the many stories Kishiar had told him, sitting by his side as he regained consciousness after two weeks. It was a speculation and analogy that had emerged from his thoughts during the hailstorm day.

'Yes, a balance.'

Like balancing scales, if everyone combined their forces to deal with each situation slowly but accurately, the effort required might actually decrease, even if the time spent in confrontation increased. If done right, it might even result in the abnormal cracks disappearing, just like during the hailstorm day.

The coordination between the team members waiting above the sea and those deep underwater, and the timing of their rotation. The aftermath of the monster's next thrashing.

Bright ideas rapidly flickered through his mind.

Yuder made his decision.

"Steiber."

"Hm?"

"I need you to go up. And to the surface as well."

"…Alone?"

"Yes. Please."

Kishiar would understand Yuder's intentions with just a few words and explanations.

What followed his decision was trust and waiting. And now, Yuder Aile understood that waiting itself was something he could embrace.

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Chapter 949

The members no longer had luminous bracelets, so instead, they tied glowing threads around their wrists. Although these emitted less light than the bracelets, it was better than having none at all.

Subsequently, Yuder used the power of water to safely guide Steiber's body upwards along the safest route. Even in the darkest visibility, as long as Steiber was within Yuder's power, there was no fear of losing the way.

After a short delay, the other members also began ascending in the same manner as Steiber. It wasn't long before the comrades waiting above started descending in turns, ensuring Yuder was never left alone. This signified that Steiber had successfully rendezvoused with the members above water and had completed his first request.

While counting the number of people, Yuder grabbed the shoulder of the last member of the original team just before he left. Surprised, the member widened his eyes and turned around, clutching his head.

"…Yuder? Why?"

Yuder moved his lips distinctly to ensure his name was clearly understood.

"Dover. When you get up there, deliver one more message."

"Suddenly? What message?"

"When there's another big tremor, I plan to attempt something. I'll need your help from above."

"Help…?"

Yuder didn't elaborate on his plan to finely cut the tentacles of the monster and push them to land. It was rare to find someone like Kishiar who could understand everything from a single word and even foresee a few steps

ahead. There wasn’t enough time to explain everything in detail, so he conveyed only the specific task they needed to perform.

“When the big tremor happens, push your power towards the land, all together.”

“Does ‘all’ include those who control the wind?”

“Yes.”

“Why are you telling me this now instead of Steiber…”

Muttering his doubts, Dover seemed to reach a conclusion and nodded in understanding.

“Never mind. There must be a reason! I’ll do as you said.”

“…”

“As long as you’re not planning to hit me, I’m good with anything.”

Dover was the same member who had accidentally hit Yuder on the back of the head earlier when tossing him a luminous bracelet. No wonder he clutched his head and turned around when Yuder grabbed his shoulder. Dover gave an awkward smile upon seeing Yuder’s silent face, then quickly disappeared upwards.

“He might be second to Steiber in ability, staying till the end… I hope he delivers the message well.”

Yuder chose not to tell Steiber, knowing he would never agree to head towards the land if he heard this plan. Despite his improved condition, Steiber was still burdened with the responsibility of his first mission, along with the roles of a Deputy Commander and the oldest in the Cavalry. Yuder knew Steiber would never leave him alone if he thought Yuder was attempting something reckless.

‘But Steiber was the only one who could reach the land fastest and whom I trusted to relay exactly what I wanted. It would be even better if he could

get his hand treated while there.’

Due to the intense stress of the battle, Steiber’s hand had become slightly numb, not noticeable to others but clear to Yuder, who had always closely observed his condition.

“Yuder! What do we do now? I heard the search is over.”

The expressions of the members who came in rotation were gravely serious. Unlike the first team, which specialized in search capabilities and the power of protection to endure long periods underwater, the second team, having waited above water until now, had many who were more talented in offensive abilities.

This was precisely the power needed at the moment.

Yuder scrutinized the faces of these members, who unlike the first team, wore their luminous bracelets properly and appeared energized from their rest.

“It might not be visible now, but below us lies the monster and the cracks we must confront,” Yuder said, slowly pointing downwards. The members swallowed nervously. Even with the small light of the bracelets, it was impossible to see clearly.

“Don’t be nervous. It’s just a creature somewhat like a large jellyfish.”

“…”

Sometimes, not giving too much information beforehand was more helpful in handling the situation. An enemy, manageable in reality, could feel stronger and larger in the dark, fed by the imagination. In the special environment of the ocean, where one couldn’t see even an inch ahead and had to move against the crushing pressure, it was better to focus only on the necessary, rather than instilling unnecessary greater fear.

After all, he couldn’t fully reveal the enemy’s appearance unless he collected and detonated the bracelets again.

“I’m going to provoke it to attack us soon. I’ll assign everyone a position to wait; stay there and attack the spot I signal. Use only water blades, no other attacks,” instructed Yuder. He detailed the size and nature of the tentacle-like legs they were to attack and how to counter them, grateful for the information accumulated by the first team who had already faced it several times.

The members, carefully memorizing the information Yuder conveyed through lip movements and hand signals, asked incredulously, “…Is that all we need to do?”

“Yes, that’s all. Cut them off and then don’t do anything else. I’ll handle the rest.”

“So, we just need to hold our positions and cut off whatever comes, following your signal? Got it. We’ll prepare.”

The task might feel too simple, but the members moved as instructed without further doubt. Their faith weighed as heavily on Yuder’s shoulders as the faith of the first team who had passed on the glowing bracelets.

Yuder looked over the members and then sent a brief hand signal to all.

“-Let’s begin.”

The rest of the members raised their hands in response.

Yuder carefully chose positions for them, ensuring that they wouldn’t accidentally harm each other in blind attacks. He then descended to the lowest point, tuning all his senses towards the cracks lurking in the darkness.

‘The timing of the monster’s tremors is irregular and unpredictable. But, I confirmed earlier that it’s possible to provoke the first attack of its tentacles, so that’s no problem.’

The ominous vibrations trickling from the cracks turned into currents, resonating against the skin. In other words, the source of the waves

indicated the presence of the creatures. Yuder remembered the direction well and gathered all his strength.

Yuder vividly remembered how Steiber had exerted the power of search and how the monster had reacted to it. Although directly killing the monster was difficult, provoking it in a similar manner to draw it out was something he could certainly do.

‘I can do it too, sufficiently.’

The water power Yuder released spread widely downwards into the depths. It was strikingly similar to Steiber’s method but honed sharper and more precise.

Unlike others, Yuder’s power gradually waned and dissipated as it neared the monster. Nevertheless, it managed to explode near where the tentacles were lurking.

Silence ensued for several minutes as they held their breaths, waiting.

Finally, a response came.

Rumbling… Roaring…

The monster stirred, sending unusual vibrations through the still waters, reminiscent of a stone tossed into a calm lake. It was exactly like the moment the tentacles reacted to Steiber’s exerted power.

Yuder counted silently, maintaining calm to avoid any mistakes due to his heightened nerves. Then, at the precise moment when something triggered his senses, stretched to their limits in anticipation of the enemy’s emergence.

“Now!”

Yuder sent an invisible signal with the power of water, perceivable to the members. As giant, transparent tentacles, resembling trees of a dense forest, lashed out in the darkness, the members unleashed their powers from their positions, following Yuder’s signal.

Hundreds of sharp, solidified water blades were fired simultaneously toward the targeted direction. Yuder too sent hundreds of blades flying. Although his power might not contribute significantly, it was enough to momentarily stagger the monster, allowing the others' attacks to hit their mark.

Roaring!

This time, unlike the first team's defensive struggle, the attack was different. Numerous tentacles, twisted like ropes, were swiftly sliced apart. Even as they writhed and tried to attack the members, the number and speed of the water blades fired by the members and Yuder were much more numerous, faster, and systematic.

Amidst the frenzied attack, Yuder saw hundreds, thousands of severed pieces beginning to surround them.

Though appearing as one mass, each piece was individually alive.

The severed and separated parts still moving confirmed Yuder's suspicions.

Now it was time for him to move all these pieces to the surface.

Yuder closed his eyes.

As his comrades continued their assault, the water enveloping him began to tremble in unison.

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Chapter 950

Many Awakeners found it challenging to wield strength beyond what they were accustomed to using daily. A person who could effortlessly lift a sack of rice could not suddenly lift two and move with ease. Enduring unfamiliar pain while needing to refine control made it a difficult task, even with prolonged practice.

In his past life, and in this one, countless individuals had asked Yuder Aile.

“How do you endure it when you have to?”

“How can you so quickly expand your strength and senses and still withstand it?”

Yuder always answered that practice was the only secret.

It wasn’t a lie. Even if practice felt futile at first, with long repetition, one could suddenly muster more strength and handle it more adeptly when needed.

But there was an unspoken secret that Yuder never revealed.

After his awakening, Yuder had never felt pain or difficulty when rapidly expanding his power.

“…”

The mist-like power flowing from Yuder’s body endlessly dissolved into the sea. Invisible, yet its presence could be felt through the surrounding tremors, ready to obey his will.

All water in this place eventually heads to land. Yuder’s expanded senses followed the large direction of the waves, beginning to read the flow.

This process was akin to losing oneself and becoming the sea itself.

The sea, regardless of any turmoil within, flows silently and swiftly.

It brushed past the fleeing schools of fish, over small crabs hiding and curling up, and under the feet of Dover and the first team members, standing on the wave's crest with tense faces, catching their breath.

The wave, like a dark blue horse, raced unrestrained and finally crashed generously against the breakwater from where Yuder had departed. The water, turning over with a splash, shattered into white foam.

Part of Yuder's consciousness scattered with those broken droplets. A tiny droplet, having briefly soared, did not return to the sea but landed on the tip of a man's shoe, standing with his feet in the water.

The man, with golden hair disheveled by the rough sea wind, looked steadily at the waves. His eyes, like a burning sunset, were deep and red.

Even though his gaze was not on Yuder, his heart, which had been as calm as the sea, suddenly pumped hot blood and beat fiercely.

-Thump.

The droplet at the tip of his shoe, unable to withstand, trickled down and returned to the sea. That was when Yuder finally opened his eyes.

-Whoosh!

His golden gaze shone brilliantly like a star in the dark sea.

The increasingly turbulent sea began to respond to Yuder's will at last.

One of the members, relying on the faint light of a bracelet in the darkness, jerked and grimaced, suddenly bringing a hand to his neck.

'Damn it!'

Cutting the massive tentacles was manageable, despite being strenuous. The real difficulty was avoiding their flailing in the barely visible darkness and getting injured in the process.

However, it was the invisible, small entities gradually filling the surroundings and their attacks that were truly unnerving. Clinging to the skin, biting and scratching, they continually broke concentration and caused chills and curses. In the midst of this, a misstep led to a tentacle strike, injuring his leg.

It was fortunate that being underwater meant no hindrance in movement despite his injured leg.

The member roughly tore off the creature that had been biting his neck. The sting suggested he was bleeding.

‘Yuder told us to only attack and do nothing else… But how long must this go on?’

He was enduring the dizzying sensation of blood diffusing into the water, trying to regain his senses, when suddenly the water around him stilled.

-…

‘…What?’

He cautiously held his breath and surveyed his surroundings.

‘…No, it’s not just the water that’s stopped…’

The flailing tentacles, growing more violent with each attack, and the ominous, thudding vibrations from below, also ceased abruptly.

Everything seemed frozen, an eerie quiet pervading all.

The surrounding water, as if the entire sea had halted, presented a bizarre spectacle. What was happening? The member, feeling rigid all over, instinctively swallowed and rolled his eyes.

And then, he saw it - a golden light standing tall like a lighthouse in the infinite darkness of the sea.

Yuder Aile’s pale face was distinctly visible beyond that golden hue.

His black hair floating around in the water, his expressionless face.

Instinctively, the member realized it. He didn’t know what Yuder had done, but this was undoubtedly his power.

Who could have imagined witnessing such a scene in their lifetime?

The vast movement of water centered around Yuder began to sweep away everything that had been enveloping them - torn seaweed, dead sea creatures, other impediments, and finally, countless tiny monster fragments that had been endlessly filling the surroundings.

Everything was swept away in the current, reminiscent of a colossal typhoon made of water, not air.

On land, no matter how immense the exerted force, the sky above and the earth below remain unshaken. Human endeavors are but small ripples under the sky.

But underwater, it’s different.

In a place seemingly consisting of only water and darkness, without sky or earth, the tremendous force felt like holding the entire world in one’s hands.

‘Ugh…!’

The member nearly screamed in alarm as the typhoon approached him. However, the wave spared him and only took away the creature that had been biting his neck. When he regained his senses, he saw that the chaotic surroundings filled with floating debris had been completely cleared.

‘How can this be…’

How could a human alone accomplish such a feat?

Amidst the overwhelming sensation, the wave that swept around the world finally began to disappear into the distance, following the direction Yuder had pointed, towards a specific spot.

Carrying countless fragments of monsters, the sea surged forward like a massive horse.

Yuder’s golden eye shone brighter, his face growing paler by the moment. Despite realizing that this indicated a tremendous expenditure of power, the member irrationally felt it only made Yuder appear more formidable.

extraordinary display of power had unfolded without the spilling of a single drop of blood. Only after the currents that had entwined the monsters dissipated into the distance did the surging waves slowly calm down.

At the heart of it all, Yuder Aile still stood.

His golden eye, which had started to dim slowly, disappeared beneath his eyelids before opening again. Though still golden, they no longer shone with the intense brightness that could be mistaken for flames.

Silence engulfed everyone. What words could possibly be spoken in such a moment?

It almost seemed as though the entire visible world was waiting for a command from Yuder Aile. Despite accomplishing what none dared attempt, Yuder, without a trace of pain, maintained an expressionless face, appearing as a being from a far-off realm to them.

While the members were still frozen in shock, Yuder slowly raised his hand and spoke.

“Snap out of it. It’s not over yet.”

Upon seeing Yuder’s firm hand signal, the members blinked as if awakening from a dream.

“Ah… Right. It’s not over yet… What?”

“We just did that… and it’s not over?!”

Far from being over, there was a larger mass of monsters writhing below, more than what had just been dispatched.

The creature was not likely to stop, and it was only a matter of time before something similar to the tentacles they had just faced would emerge again.

Yuder's task now was simply to wait until then.

"For a first attempt, it was relatively successful. But many members are injured… We need to check on them."

"What exactly did we just do? Where did you send those things?"

The members, now fully regaining their senses, crowded around in a frenzy. Yuder calmly answered.

"As you saw, I sent them to land."

"Is that really okay?"

"That's why I sent Steiber. With the Commander there, everything will be fine."

"Ah…!"

The members finally understood what they needed to do. Yuder thought about the land where the monsters he had successfully dispatched were headed.

He trusted Kishiar. Surely, Kishiar would handle what Yuder had sent appropriately.

And now,

Yuder finally heard the news of success through the words of the returned Steiber.

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Chapter 951

Yuder finally heard the news of success through the words of the returned Steiber.

“I thought it was incomprehensible gibberish, but the Commander understood immediately upon hearing it. I saw everything you did on my way here and how the Commander dealt with it,” Steiber had reported.

Steiber, shortly after departing from the land, encountered the aftermath of a massive current caused by Yuder. Initially, the tremendous vibrations and unusual movements rising from below led him to believe a monster had finally reached them. This prompted an early dive, before reaching the location of Dover and the first team members. Upon entry, he was met with an incredible sight: a massive swarm of indeterminate debris, caught in a whirlwind-like current originating from the deep sea, being pushed towards the land.

Yes, it could only be described as a mass of debris.

Transparent, barely discernible fragments of various monsters were chaotically mixed with sea plants and branches floating in the ocean. The sight of the seawater, as if with a will of its own, sweeping and pushing this debris was both wondrous and unbelievable.

The massive flow nonchalantly passed beneath his feet. Stunned by the unexpected sight, Steiber used his strength to head back toward the land, eager to understand what it all meant.

Soon after, he witnessed everything being torn apart by a massive sword aura that had come flying from the land.

True sword aura, they say, splits everything it touches. The sword aura used by Kishiar did just that, even splitting the dense fog over the sea.

For a brief moment, through the cleanly split air, Steiber glimpsed the divine sword held by the Commander.

The sight was neat and overwhelmingly impressive.

Though he only indirectly experienced the thrill sent by the sea split by the sword aura from afar, Steiber thought he would never forget that scene for the rest of his life.

Even though he had never directly seen the sword aura of a swordmaster before, he immediately recognized what it was. Anyone from the capital knew the legends of the first Emperor leaving the Emperor's Sword Mark with the divine sword Orr, having grown up hearing them.

The sword aura, said to be so immense it could split the sky and earth, was a brilliant blue.

And the resplendent silver of the divine sword Orr, emitting it and protecting its master.

Steiber had been the one to accompany Kishiar to the capital recently, when Kishiar went to verify his rightful ownership of the real divine sword at the Pope's request. Even though he was born and lived in the capital, the deepest interior of the Imperial Grand Remple he entered for the first time was beautiful but also uncomfortably disturbing.

Most of those present believed Kishiar to be deceiving and were intent on exposing the falsehood, their eyes wide open with anticipation. It had been a long time since the Emperor's authority waned and the nobles began to belittle the imperial family, but perhaps their attitude was too presumptuous. Just standing in the back, Steiber's fists trembled with the offensive remarks that were hurled incessantly.

It was unbearable to just stand and watch those who hardly seemed to have had a proper conversation with Kishiar La Orr insult the Commander so cunningly. If it had been young, hot-blooded men there instead of Steiber, they probably would have thrown punches without a second thought.

Steiber suspected that was probably why he had been chosen for this role.

However, the Commander remained composed. At that moment, he appeared slightly more fatigued than usual, yet he countered the adversaries' nonsensical remarks with a smile, elegantly and without a hint of weariness. To the casual observer, it might have seemed as though Kishiar was merely laughing off insulting comments, but after the conversation, it was invariably those who had instigated the argument who were left red-faced.

And then, he, appearing last in front of the Pope, did not lose his composure as he drew the divine sword Orr, presenting it before everyone.

In stark contrast to its ornate scabbard, adorned with various jewels and magic symbols, the blade that emerged seemed surprisingly unremarkable. However, this was merely Steiber's uninitiated impression, as the Pope and others fell silent and attentive in a moment.

"…May I examine it closely?"

The Pope's vision was poor. He brought a thick lens to his eye and carefully inspected the blade of the divine sword, then slowly placed his hand over the sword's body.

He was seeking to verify firsthand that the divine sword responded to divine power. Everyone watched intently, not wanting to miss a single detail.

Divine power slowly flowed from within the Pope's wrinkled fingers. Despite his title, the amount wasn't as immense as one might expect, especially compared to those like Lusan who used divine power liberally. However, objectively speaking, it was far more substantial than most of the priests who lacked divine power.

When the Pope removed his hand, a new light emerged over the silver blade. Everyone could feel the unique and mystical divine power it emitted.

The light shattered, transforming into some sort of scripture before eventually subsiding. The Pope, bringing his hands together, declared,

“This is undoubtedly the real divine sword Orr. I am honored to meet the new master of the sword before presenting him to the embrace of the divine.”

His quiet but unequivocally clear affirmation stirred everyone. Some murmured in disbelief, while others demanded a more thorough confirmation method, questioning how mere observation of divine power infused in the sword could be enough. It amazed Steiber that, even after witnessing a miracle of the divine sword that no one else could replicate, such skepticism could exist.

Ultimately, it was Kishiar himself who silenced the clamorous scene.

“Verification, you say? I don’t mind doing whatever.”

“Very well, then let’s proceed with another method…!”

“But I do have one concern. What if, in conducting additional verification, someone suspects that I doubt the authenticity of the divine power personally manifested by His Holiness the Pope? I would be fine if that’s not the case.”

His questioning, accompanied by an innocent smile and a tilt of the head, seemed almost too naive for his stature. Everyone around the Pope fell abruptly silent.

“…”

Everyone here knew that the priests nowadays struggled due to their almost non-existent divine power. It was not for no reason that young priests, reputed to be born with abundant divine power, were summoned all the way to the grand temple. Lusan, too, would have had a place there if he had been fortunate enough in this regard.

Priests who wanted to keep their lack of divine power a secret occasionally resorted to deception. They would disguise the luminance emitted when using divine power with magic tools and the like.

Thus, Kishiar's statement was essentially a pointed inquiry, wondering if the Pope might have indulged in such a shameful act. Of course, no one had actually entertained such a thought, but the fact remained that there were calls for more and thorough verification methods.

The Pope, a figure of neutrality who had aged into profound quietude, deemed it unnecessary to concern himself with the matter. It was simply a case of excessive eagerness born from the desire of those fixated on exposing Duke Peletta's falsehoods.

Kishiar's question incisively exploited this weakness, swiftly overturning the atmosphere.

No matter how impudent they were, none could dare assert in the Pope's presence that the divine power he personally wielded was not genuine. Such a claim would transcend the Pope himself, implicating the honor and identity of the entire Temple of the Sun God.

The rude onlookers quickly fell silent, and the eyes of those accompanying the Pope grew more stern. Eventually, the impertinent ones left hastily, murmuring hopes of meeting again. Not long after, the Pope departed, having spent some time in private conversation with Kishiar.

Steiber felt a deep sense of satisfaction. He only regretted not being able to laugh out loud.

And now, standing before the southern seas, Steiber felt an even greater emotion watching Kishiar wield the sword, emanating an aura more intense than anyone else's. There it was, the 'real' sword mastery that anyone who had practiced with a sword, including lads like Jimmy who used to play knights with wooden swords before awakening, had dreamed of.

How he wished those insolent ones could have witnessed this spectacle!

They, more than anyone, should have seen it!

It was as if he had glimpsed a scene from a myth…

Several times, Steiber paused in his explanation, seemingly unable to fully express his emotions through mere hand signals.

“Anyway, after confirming the Commander’s response, I immediately returned. I met with Dover and the others too.”

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Chapter 952

“Anyway, after confirming the Commander’s response, I immediately returned. I met with Dover and the others too.”

The current Yuder had created was immensely large. Naturally, it was impossible to finely control something of such magnitude. The implication was that he could not afford to pay attention to every monster that got deflected in different directions during the process of pushing them toward land.

To correct these deviations and ensure safety on the water, Yuder decided to enlist the help of Dover and the first team members. They quickly realized that the monsters bouncing out of the current and shooting up through the water were precisely the subjects of Yuder’s requested assistance.

While members skilled in water manipulation pushed the waves towards land, those adept in wind joined in, directing their gusts in the same direction to aid in the effort. The combination of water and wind added strength from above, making Yuder’s current even more powerful.

Yuder exhaled deeply upon hearing that everything had gone according to plan.

Though he was confident, dealing with monsters was unpredictable, and there was always a chance things could go awry. It was only now beginning to sink in that everyone had trusted Yuder’s judgment in such a perilous situation, managing to deal with the first tentacle without any loss of life.

Despite knowing he shouldn’t let his guard down, Yuder felt strangely relieved.

He glanced at the members busily attending to their wounds and then spoke up.

“Are those who were injured alright?”

“There’s no one seriously hurt, so of course they’re alright.”

After responding, Steiber fell silent for a moment, appearing somewhat hesitant.

“Steiber?”

Wondering if there was something he hadn’t said, Yuder looked at him, prompting Steiber to sigh and smile.

“No. Just wondering if it’s okay to say ‘thank you.’”

“…Why would you say that all of a sudden?”

“This, this right here.”

Steiber gently shook his wrists.

“Now that I’m healed, leave the next steps to me, the Sul Division’s Deputy Commander, and also check your condition. We need to help each other to survive, right?”

“…”

“That guy with the injured leg should probably be sent up, and we can call someone else from above to take his place. Seems like I’ve shared all the reports, so let’s get back to our duties!”

Steiber smiled and exercised his power over water. A few small droplets formed and flew towards Yuder’s shoulder and back, bursting upon contact and then vanishing. It was a mode of communication befitting an Awakener who knew how to manipulate water, almost like a gentle tap, but without using hands.

When Yuder looked away from the burst droplets, Steiber had already moved towards the other members, leaving only his back visible.

‘…Is the main point to tell me to check my condition?’

From the moment Steiber was sent to land with limited information and a specific intent, he could have been angry with Yuder. Even if it was out of trust in his abilities and concern for his well-being, Steiber had every reason to feel slighted.

‘If it were Kanna, she would’ve timidly asked if she hadn’t been helpful, and if it were Ever, she would’ve resolved her feelings by actively participating in the next task assignment.’

But Steiber was distinctly different from the other two Deputy Commanders.

This more mature demeanor, even compared to his previous life’s memories of Steiber, probably stemmed from the changes he had undergone, knowingly or unknowingly, in this life.

Yuder glanced at his shoulder where Steiber’s water droplets had tapped and moved, then descended below. The vibrations rising again from the sea were becoming ominously intense.

-

“Commander! We’ve dealt with the last of them!”

“Over here as well, all cleared and retrieved!”

Kishiar approached a mound of monster corpses and other impurities near the breakwater, almost as large as a small hill. Many monsters had survived even after his initial unleashing of sword aura. Having dealt with all of them and retrieved the bodies, the pile had grown to this size.

“How’s the situation in other areas?”

“We’ve just received a report that the monsters that drifted to other areas have been easily handled as well.”

“That’s a relief.”

Kishiar picked up one of the monster corpses piled in front of him. With a sticky sound, the corpse he pulled out bore various shapes and sizes of teeth and eyes that seemed alive.

It looked like something created by chopping up and mixing the bodies of every plant and animal in the world, then turning the concoction transparent.

“Monsters are inherently difficult to classify distinctly, but this batch seems uniquely bizarre, perhaps enough to go down in history.”

“Indeed. I’ve never seen anything like this before.”

The one who responded was Hellem. She had come to deliver the news that the traps set up by the mages were functioning well and had found herself unable to leave the sight of this heap of monster corpses.

Her expression was serious as she examined several of the bodies laid out in front of her, using a few magic tools she had brought along.

“Have you discovered anything?”

“Oh, you’re in a hurry. Haven’t I just started examining these creatures? You’re expecting results too soon.”

After saying this, Hellem chuckled and pushed up her glasses.

“…But who am I, if not the continent’s foremost monster research mage?”

“And that means?”

“These creatures seem to be made of a mixture of various materials, forming a structure that appears to be a single entity, but it’s futile to try to determine where one individual begins and ends. They can move separately and yet together. However, there’s one common characteristic among these irregular beings.”

Hellem pointed to the heap of monster corpses.

“Their skin, or the outer part, is made of the same material.”

Kishiar stared at the monster corpse he had just picked up.

“It’s transparent and squishy. Almost like a jellyfish.”

“Yes, exactly.”

Hellem nodded and continued.

“Though more investigation is needed, creatures with this kind of skin are typically found in the sea… as you said, Commander, like jellyfish or squid. And such creatures often struggle to maintain their form in the presence of heat or poison.”

Hellem revealed that she had already tried burning a few of the monster corpses. As expected, they contracted and shriveled rapidly upon contact with fire, confirming the hypothesis of their weakness to heat.

“Hmm.”

“The individual strength and power of these creatures isn’t particularly formidable, so even without such measures, they would be easy to handle. But this will be useful information for the civilians in the towns.”

“We should instruct the shelters to prepare torches.”

“And when using weapons against them, it might be better to attack by accurately targeting the core parts that make up their form, rather than slashing randomly. If you cut too carelessly, they keep moving even when severed. Of course, for someone with your strength, Commander, such advice may seem unnecessary.”

Instead of responding, Kishiar smiled.

“Not at all. Your advice is quite meaningful to me. It will be tough, but keep observing.”

“Understood.”

Kishiar looked around. The morale of those gathered here had significantly increased compared to before, undoubtedly related to the aura he had just displayed.

‘I usually don’t resort to such tactics.’

Taking the lead at the forefront to dominate the initial phase of the battle and then leading the surrounding forces was a strategy often employed by Yuder Aile. In a way, it was his style of combat.

It might seem recklessly bold at first glance, but real combat differed from games.

Those who witnessed the overwhelming prowess of the one leading were not just gaining an experience and morale boost that couldn’t be quantified by simple numbers or win-loss ratios. The immense value of this intangible asset was amply proven by the atmosphere on the field.

“Do you think they will reappear soon?”

Nathan Zuckerman, following behind Kishiar, asked in a low voice. Kishiar nodded.

“Yes. This is just the beginning; they will keep coming.”

“How many times do you anticipate this will happen?”

“Hmm. That’s impossible for me to predict. Even Yuder hasn’t informed us.”

“…”

Nathan Zuckerman’s gaze darkened slightly. Unlike the uplifted spirits of the team members, he understood the hidden implications of the uncertainty regarding how many times such incidents might repeat.

It seemed easy for now, but what about the future?

An attack without a set end could, in some ways, be more daunting than a fierce, short-term battle.

Kishiar continued, as if reading Nathan Zuckerman’s thoughts.

“The fight ahead will likely be a battle of morale and stamina. It’s like a game of batting back and forth with those creatures, like playing catch. So make sure you manage your energy well.”

Clearly, Kishiar’s decision to lead the first assault himself, ending it overwhelmingly, took such considerations into account.

“Here they come again from the sea!”

At that moment, team members observing the sea shouted and waved their arms. Kishiar stared at the frothing distant sea, a fierce smile on his face.

“Here comes another ball sent by Yuder. Let’s go and strike back.”

The mass within the crack, having lost its long tentacles, stilled momentarily as if assessing the situation, and then began to thrash wildly, attempting to break free once more. In this process, two tentacles, thinner but faster than before, emerged from two of the six cracks.

Steiber’s team gritted their teeth and desperately dodged and attacked these tentacles. It felt like being shackled in the dark, fighting an enemy that could strike from anywhere, but their training had not been in vain. With just a few signals from Yuder and Steiber, the team members put forth their utmost effort to fulfill their roles.

Yuder, too, participated in the attack to some extent, and when the area began to fill with severed tentacle pieces, he once again created a current similar to the previous one.

-Kwaaaaaa–!

Although slightly less powerful than before, the current was still strong enough to sweep away the monsters, churning through the sea and heading towards land.

“Everyone, push together!”

The other members on the water, upon spotting the incoming threat, clenched their teeth and pushed the waves with all their might.

“Here it comes! Everyone, get ready!”

The members lined up on land did not fear the approaching current but faced it bravely, weapons in hand. Those who plunged fearlessly into the water succeeded in turning all the monster pieces into corpses after a fierce battle.

The third and fourth currents were also dealt with in the same manner. The exhausted members were rotated out, and those underwater with Yuder switched places with those above. The shining bracelets eased the transition for those entering the water, reducing discomfort.

From the fifth wave onwards, Kishiar, concerned for the team members who had hardly rested even on the surface, sent small boats carrying holy water and priests. This became a hub for communication, allowing for much more agile transmission of information.

“Yuder! The Commander’s side has dealt with all of this batch too. They’re asking if you’re alright…”

“Tell them I’m still okay. And the Commander?”

“As you might expect, the Commander is the most unscathed among us.”

Yuder’s strategy involved cutting and pushing the enemies towards Kishiar and the colleagues on land, who then killed them. Based on the reports from Kishiar, Yuder gauged the status of himself and the others, adjusting their movements accordingly.

Nathan Zuckerman, observing this, realized the truth in his lord’s words.

‘Just like the Duke said. This is really… just like a game of catch.’

It felt similar, even though the ‘ball’ was unimaginably huge, beyond anyone’s imagination.

But even in a game of catch among the most skilled, there inevitably comes a time when the ball veers off in an unexpected direction.

This happened on the ninth wave.

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Chapter 953

It was just before dawn, as the first light of day was about to break, when people first felt the unusual tremors emanating from the depths of the sea and were hastily evacuated. Yuder entered the water a couple of hours later, after the Cavalry had assembled that morning.

Up until facing the fifth and sixth currents, the members of the Cavalry and the Imperial Army still had some energy left. They would hurriedly eat while on rotation, even managing to crack jokes amidst the tension.

However, when it came time to confront the ninth current, things were a bit different.

Unlike the seventh and eighth currents, which had come almost back-to-back, there was a significantly longer interval before the ninth arrived. The sun had begun to set after they dealt with the eighth, and as the night deepened without any news, the members secretly harbored hope that it might have ended there.

“Hey, remember during the hailstorm day? After a while, two of the cracks disappeared, right? Maybe this time, a few of them have… disappeared too?”

This was blurted out by one of the members, who stood facing the sea in wait.

“If that had happened, we would have heard from Yuder by now. The last report said there was no change. Don’t get your hopes up,” sharply pointed out someone else, but once the conversation started, it couldn’t be stopped.

“No, but still, it’s been hours since the tremors stopped… Maybe we’ve almost wiped out all the monsters. Look at the size of that mound over there. You’d believe it if someone said it contained all the monsters caught across the empire in a year.”

A weary-faced member pointed towards a pile of monster carcasses not far away. It had reached a size where, if covered with soil, it could be mistaken for a small hill. Someone even joked about taking a post-dinner walk over there. Seeing not one, but five such enormous piles of carcasses, it was hard to imagine anything more could come forth.

“Members, you must be tired.”

“Why don’t you eat some potatoes to regain your strength?”

This was suggested by some soldiers of the Imperial Army’s Special Forces, who had squeezed into the conversation. They were seated near a campfire set up for those reaching their physical limits. Until just a moment ago, there hadn’t been time for much conversation, as everyone was ready to spring into action at any signal. But once the conversation started flowing, it naturally continued.

“But… has the Commander’s assistant really been underwater since this morning without coming up?”

“It seems so.”

“How is that possible? Others have been rotating multiple times, coming here to replenish their strength and then going back.”

“Right. I was wondering about that too. Did he even eat underwater? Isn’t it dangerous to force him to keep going without a break…?”

Their questions, a mix of amazement and concern, led the Cavalry members to exchange looks. Truthfully, they too were astonished that Yuder had managed to stay underwater for such an extended period, and equally astounded by the immense power displayed in pushing back the giant currents, not once but eight times.

But all their astonishment culminated in one conclusion.

“It’s a pointless question. It’s Yuder Aile, after all.”

“Well, it’s just… Yuder, so maybe that explains it.”

“The spirit of the Cavalry should be exactly like that.”

What exactly was the spirit of the Cavalry? This was a recurring question among the Special Forces members ever since they met the Cavalry, yet no one had a clear answer.

In that moment, what struck them as amusing was the realization that, having heard it continuously, they were gradually coming to accept it as if they were becoming a part of it.

“Ah, yes. The spirit of the Cavalry… I see…”

“Sigh… Anyway, I wish it would either start again soon or finally come to an end.”

These words were muttered softly by someone. This time, none of the members responded.

Kanna Wand and Gakane Bolunwald, standing a little distance away, were also observing this scene.

“Did you ever imagine it would take this long, Kanna?”

“No, I didn’t.”

Kanna shook her head. Her role had been to constantly travel between different areas, monitoring and adjusting, while Gakane was assigned to protect her, lacking combat skills herself.

“This is serious. Everyone looks utterly exhausted. It’s not like the number of people at their physical limit suddenly increased…”

“When you’re constantly training, you’re too distracted to feel tired, but once you sit down to rest, you don’t want to get up again. Even if you still have the energy to train. It’s probably a similar feeling to that.”

“I suppose so.”

Gakane Bolunwald, whose resilience was even acknowledged by Yuder, had never felt the reluctance to rise again in such a situation. However, having seen many colleagues struggle in these circumstances, he could roughly understand it.

‘…This really is a problem.’

And Kanna, with Gakane by her side, frowned as she entertained a thought she couldn’t voice.

‘During training, even if you feel like this, your life isn’t in danger. But it’s different now.’

Although Commander Kishiar was rotating the members based on Kanna’s reports, taking into account what they couldn’t express verbally, it preserved their physical strength but couldn’t prevent their spirits from weakening.

Until now, there had been no time to worry about their spirits loosening under the relentless onslaught, but the sudden lull was problematic. No matter how experienced and skilled, it’s impossible to maintain tension indefinitely.

‘…Except for Yuder. And maybe Commander and Nathan Zuckerman…’

Kanna glanced at Kishiar and Nathan Zuckerman, who were talking not far away. Her ability, which she had opened to read the influx of information from all around in a shallow and wide manner, allowed her to realize that they, unlike the others, were still in the same state as at the beginning.

From them, she could not sense any exhausted murmurs or unconscious sighs.

Although she knew that a swordmaster possessed extraordinary physical endurance, experiencing it in this way was something she hadn’t anticipated. Their mental fortitude was terrifyingly impressive.

‘But we’re not that extraordinary. Everyone’s holding up for now, but if this wait gets any longer… Hmm. I hope I’m not over-worrying.’

Kanna sighed and approached Kishiar. Initially, she had intended to wait until their conversation ended to report, but seeing her colleagues growing more fatigued without any development, she decided it might be better to speak up now.

Indeed, what more could Kishiar do in this situation? But expressing even the smallest worry seemed better than keeping silent, whatever it might be.

That was one of the lessons Kanna Wand had learned after the day of the hailstorm.

“Commander, I’m sorry to interrupt your conversation.”

As she approached, Kishiar, unsurprised, turned his gaze towards her. Kanna took a moment to catch her breath, briefly reported on the situation in other regions she had read about on her way over, and then hesitantly brought up the sentiments she had just discerned among her colleagues.

“It seems that after the eighth current, with hours passing without any incident, people are feeling increasingly fatigued. They’re not being complacent, but I think that perhaps…”

“Commander! There’s news from the sea!”

Just then, a message arrived from a ship stationed at sea. It was a communication sent by Yuder.

“It seems the monsters are about to emerge again. The tremors are intensifying.”

“Understood.”

Kishiar raised his hand, launching a signal flare from a magic device. The movements of those who had been somewhat lax instantly became coordinated and swift.

Kanna had thought that the Commander would simply turn away, but instead, he turned his head and asked her.

“Kanna, what were you about to say?”

“Eh? Oh…! I was going to mention that the continued waiting seems to be causing a rapid increase in mental fatigue among the other members, and that some response might be needed. But seeing them now… it seems I might have been overly concerned.”

“Not at all.”

The Commander gave an unexpected reply.

“Really?”

“Maintaining tension for such a long time isn’t easy for anyone. The gap after the eighth was long, and this was to be expected.”

“Oh, I see. You already knew.”

“But knowing and being able to read and feel it as clearly as you did are different matters. Your report wasn’t excessive.”

Kanna’s ears reddened slightly. Kishiar continued speaking quietly.

“Even the sturdiest shield will eventually be breached if it keeps taking hits. But if the one holding the shield knows when that might happen, the risk of a fatal blow at the moment of breach is greatly reduced. Wouldn’t you agree?”

If one could retreat appropriately, even if damage was taken, it could be minimized. Kanna understood what the Commander was trying to convey.

“…Yes, you’re right.”

“The ninth will likely be the toughest battle. Be careful.”

Kishiar patted Kanna's shoulder and drew his sword. Kanna saluted firmly, still not accustomed to the enduring beauty of the man she had observed almost all year.

Gakane hurried to her side.

"…Kanna! The monsters are coming again soon. Let's go."

"No, Gakane. This time, it's better to stay here instead of retreating."

"What? Why?"

Until now, they had always retreated early to the back when monsters approached, knowing they would not be of help. However, Kanna thought that this battle, potentially the hardest for everyone, might be when they were needed the most.

"Even with utmost caution, there comes a time when you face it. If that time is now, I want to do whatever I can."

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Chapter 954

At the same time, Yuder was deep in the ocean, sharing a similar thought to Kanna.

“Indeed, the fatigue of the mind is a greater problem than that of the body.”

Although he had never been in this exact situation in his previous life, he had experienced many prolonged battles. In this life, he had overcome situations in the West with ease, but in his previous life, wasn’t there a long march of death and defeat, spanning over a month?

From that experience, he realized that as long as the mind remained strong, even a body at its limit could survive. Conversely, if the mind gave up, even a physically strong person could lose a battle they should have won.

The mind, therefore, was trickier and more difficult to manage than the body. If one thought it was hard, even a healthy body would suddenly feel the strain. If one believed they could endure no more, they would indeed reach their limit.

Nahan’s illusory powers were not to be underestimated. His actual strength was only slightly greater than Kanna’s, yet he could threaten Yuder because he knew and could manipulate this aspect better than anyone.

Thus, when Yuder decided to face the six anomalous cracks and the giant monster in a prolonged battle, his greatest concern wasn’t reaching his physical limits.

It was the possibility that, like now, after a long fight with no visible results, the morale and attitudes of the Cavalry members might change. That was the most challenging aspect.

“Yuder! The vibrations have started again. Is it coming out?”

After a brief rest on the water, upon hearing the news that the ninth battle would likely start, Steiber quickly came down and moved his lips rapidly. Yuder quickly assessed his condition in a short and swift manner. Steiber's hands still moved well enough not to look strange to others, and perhaps because he had gone up to the water earlier to briefly eat some bread, his complexion also looked fine. However, despite taking good care of his physique to the extent that the aftermath was not severe, an undeniable fatigue was evident in his eyes.

The long wait between the eighth and ninth battles had made maintaining tension difficult, bringing to the forefront the fatigue they had been suppressing.

"Yes. But we might need to observe a bit more before starting the battle in earnest."

"Damn it. Why is it slowing down now? Is it kneading dough inside or something?"

Steiber cursed, uncharacteristically. This was another sign of his exhaustion. Other members, with similar expressions, stared intently at the dark seabed. They seemed too drained to even join in his cursing.

"We rested on land, but everyone's movements have slowed even more."

The awkward waiting period was both a rest and not a rest, like a slowly spreading poison.

Those who had experienced such situations even once knew to be more cautious and measure their condition when faced with them again. But those without experience could not do the same, leaving it up to the leaders and the experienced to lead well. Yuder was worried whether the members would follow his instructions as well this time. Even he found it hard to be sure.

'In the past, I would have slapped them on the back of their heads to snap them out of it and change the mood, but this time… I don't want to do that.'

If he were Yudrain from his previous life, he wouldn’t have bothered with such concerns. In a situation where a moment’s inattention could cost a life, there was no need to use such roundabout methods.

But now, it was different.

The Cavalry members before Yuder had trusted him and put in hours of effort without any complaints. He knew none of them had been lazy or tried to flee, yet he didn’t want to resort to quick solutions just because they were more efficient.

He wondered, what would Kishiar have done in this situation?

‘Perhaps, he would have found the most effective words of encouragement for them, obtaining his desired result.’

But even though Yuder had learned everything from him, he never quite mastered this aspect. The most effective methods he knew when managing weary members were firstly, a physical reprimand, and secondly, exclusion from duties.

However, there was a last resort when neither of those two options was viable.

Yuder gazed at his hands, lost in thought.

‘Maybe the best course for the ninth time is for me to act alone…’

The last resort. To resolve it alone through strength.

It wasn’t an easy method, but its effectiveness was certain.

“Yuder.”

Just then, Steiber tapped Yuder’s shoulder. Turning his head, Yuder listened as Steiber spoke.

“If we still have time while waiting for that thing to emerge, can I suggest taking a short break outside… but you won’t go, will you?”

“…”

Why is he asking this again?

In truth, Steiber and the other members had been repeating the same question to Yuder since noon, suggesting he take even a short break outside. Of course, Yuder had not agreed then, as monsters were continuously emerging without a break.

After the eighth battle and before the ninth, he had contemplated going out, but he chose to stay, concerned about any changes in the crack while he was away.

Complacency could be momentary, but the consequences of an unforeseen earthquake could last years. Unlike the other members who were nearing their physical limits, Yuder didn’t find it difficult to endure, so he had no regrets about his decision.

‘Even so, I never expected I could hold out this long…’

In his previous life, he had no need to venture into the sea, as the southern earthquake had already devastated the area. Even when preparing for this event, he was too busy with other matters to leisurely test how long he could last underwater.

Creating eight massive currents and pushing them to the surface was undoubtedly exhausting. But enduring underwater was a different matter. To Yuder, it felt no different than asking how long he could breathe and withstand the wind on land.

‘Besides, it seems the longer I stay here, the more I adapt.’

Yuder speculated that this might be due to his inherent affinity for natural elements, combined with the power of the Red Stone he had absorbed during the hailstorm.

That day, the power spread and spread until it finally penetrated the mana hole that exists beneath the stomach. It was the first time Yuder had used

such a great power. The abilities he remembered having were clearly not to this extent, yet handling the power felt surprisingly easy, comfortable, and smooth.

He had often felt progress each time he surpassed his limits by absorbing the power of the Red Stone, but this time was the most significant.

The fact that the dark red veins spread through his body were not visible outside his clothes was proof enough of his immense power.

But such details were not something he could easily explain to others. Yuder simply responded in his usual straightforward manner.

“Yes, I have no intention of going out,” Yuder replied firmly.

“Thought so,” Steiber said, almost as if he expected this answer. Just as Yuder wondered why Steiber had asked if he already knew the answer, Steiber signaled to the other members who had just returned from resting outside the water.

Unbeknownst to Yuder, they had gathered unusually close to him. As Yuder’s eyes narrowed in confusion, the members brought their hands, which had been hidden behind their backs, forward.

“Look! We knew you’d say that and brought these.”

“…”

Yuder was momentarily speechless at what they held.

“…Potatoes… and bread?”

Yes, it was indeed potatoes and bread.

However, these were not in their ordinary state. They appeared protected, with a bubble-like empty space around them, as if enveloped in a shield. Yuder immediately understood how this had been possible.

The members had delicately pushed away the surrounding water using their power over water, then fixed it in place. The fact that this protection had not broken during their descent was a testament to the collaborative effort, which would have been impossible alone.

“Stop staring and eat quickly! It’s hard to maintain this!”

Yuder, still looking at the potatoes and bread, heard the members’ collective outcry. Swallowing his astonishment, he picked them up. His own power interacted with that of the members, but the bread remained unchanged.

Why had they gone through such a challenging task, expending their energy needlessly? Before Yuder could articulate his thoughts, Steiber broke into a hearty laugh.

“Don’t be too hard on us. We all combined our strength just to feed you. How can we eat our fill if you don’t? Have at least one. You need to eat to face the ninth challenge. The potatoes were freshly roasted on land and sent here.”

Yuder turned to look at the faces of the members, who seemed to be watching him as if they were guardians until he ate.

He had thought they were exhausted, and indeed they were, but there was one thing Yuder had to admit he was wrong about.

The Cavalry members were certainly tired, but their faith had not wavered in the slightest.

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Chapter 955

The Cavalry members were certainly tired, but their faith had not wavered in the slightest.

Honestly, it was truly astonishing. The prolongation of the battle was a consequence of Yuder's choice, and not a single crack had vanished yet. It would have been no surprise if someone harbored doubts, discontent, or even irritation towards Yuder's chosen response.

It would have been normal to have some negative reactions, but the complete absence of such was, in its own way, unfamiliar.

Having trained together, they all knew well that Yuder could skip a few meals without issue. Yet, they willingly risked danger to bring him a single potato or a small piece of bread.

The intent in their eyes was clear and definite.

As long as Yuder did not give up, neither would they.

Their sharing of food with Yuder was like a strong assertion that they were one Cavalry, bound to stand together in everything.

Perhaps, to them, caring for their weary bodies and hearts was more important than fearing an unprecedented defeat.

Yuder slowly put a piece of bread into his mouth, meeting their gaze. It was an inefficient act during a time when they should be vigilant against cracks and monsters. Logically, it was madness. Yet, he continued to chew and swallow, even as he felt the growing vibrations from below.

The warmth still lingering in the potato he bit into next felt as intense and stimulating as summer sunlight to his body, accustomed to the darkness and cold of the ocean depths. Strangely, he felt this moment would linger long in his memory.

When he finished the last bite, smiles appeared on the tired faces of his members. The concern he had just moments ago about how to alleviate their mental exhaustion seemed utterly meaningless now.

“I knew you’d finish it!”

“Tasty, right? I wish I could have brought more.”

Yuder Aile, despite his long tenure in the Cavalry, felt a sensation he seemed to experience for the first time.

How could such inefficient exchanges of actions feel so helpful?

At that moment, a memory surfaced, a phrase someone had said long ago.

“When do you think is the most crucial time to put your utmost faith in a move? When the game just starts? When you play a winning move? Or when you capture the opponent’s king?”

“No. The answer is during the most disadvantageous moments. When it feels like failing, when it’s time to retreat, when it’s hardest.”

“Faith is inherently inefficient. Sometimes, it feels like the foolish blindness of those who can’t see reality. But I don’t think so. Do you know why?”

What had he answered then? He couldn’t quite recall. Probably, he was annoyed, thinking it was a tease during a losing game.

In his hazy memory, a man in white gloves, sitting in front of a strategy game board, curved his lips into a smile.

“I hope someday you’ll understand the practical value of that inefficient tactic.”

With a definitive click, the stone piece landed on the board, clashing against others, the sound echoing in Yuder’s ears. As a void within him began to fill, a vibration that had been softly pulsing at his feet suddenly intensified explosively.

Rumble…!

“Everyone, to your positions. Get ready!”

At Steiber’s signal, his arm waving in a pattern, the members scattered with stern expressions. Yuder spared them only a fleeting glance, their movements noticeably slower than before, but he decided not to concern himself any further. Not because he felt it unnecessary, but because he had shifted his focus.

“Yuder! I’ll lure it in!”

Steiber sent an attack signal to Yuder and exerted his strength downwards. His power had a way of provoking the monster more forcefully than anyone else present. As expected, his strength took effect, and soon, an ominous current could be felt.

“It’s coming!”

After eight encounters, one could roughly predict the enemy’s movements. Although fatigued and slowed, the members now moved with familiar ease, exerting the necessary force without explicit orders.

The oncoming tentacle, massive but transparent, used the ocean’s darkness as a hiding place, effectively concealing itself. To evade it, reliance on senses other than sight was crucial, especially the ability to keenly feel the flow of water.

The length of time between the eighth and ninth appearance wasn’t long just for them. The enemy, too, was subject to the same passage of time, and might have changed in some way. Everyone sharpened their senses to the extreme, hurling blades made of water.

Yuder, blending in among them, threw the most blades, while using his heightened perception to observe and analyze the enemy as best as he could in the chaotic darkness. It was exceedingly difficult, but his determination made it gradually possible.

The interval before the ninth tentacle’s emergence, and the subtle changes in the newly appeared foe. His eyes, shining like gold, missed nothing, recording everything in his mind.

Monsters don’t act with intelligence. They tear through this world as uninvited intruders, immediately considering all living beings as enemies and attacking them. Some don’t attack, usually hiding in places deep underground or in the depths of the sea, where life is hard to detect.

Yuder, recalling the scene in his dream of numerous things trying to escape through a tiny gap, continued his relentless observation of the monster.

In his mind, every detail of the tentacles he had faced, from the first to the present, along with the tactics of the members and the monster’s reactions, were all vividly present.

“Ssshh!”

“It’s a bit smaller than before.”

This time, the tentacle appeared more flimsy, resembling a loosely interwoven loop rather than a singular limb.

Whooosh!

“But faster.”

Steiber’s water blade sliced through the tentacle, causing it to writhe more swiftly as if glowing. The severed parts, swept away by the current, overwhelmed the nearby members. Previously avoidable, they were now unable to dodge and were engulfed by them.

Blood diffused in the water and stifled shouts emerged as bubbles, bursting forth soundlessly. As Yuder waved his hand toward his team, the current he created bravely collided with the waves stirred by the monster, pushing the members farther away. Yuder’s force easily shattered before the monster’s thrashing, yet it bought enough time for the members to detach the monster clinging to them and regroup.

Yuder narrowly dodged an oncoming tentacle, flipping his body over. In his inverted view, he faintly discerned the form of the enemy.

‘… it’s definitely become thinner.’

While the members might have found it hard to gauge due to the massive amount of tentacles they had cut through until the eighth encounter, Yuder clearly remembered the size of the gigantic mass of the monster he had first seen. By his estimation, even after cutting so much, they had not yet halved it.

That not even one of the six cracks had disappeared was unexpected, but Yuder did not doubt his methods or conjectures because of it.

‘If I consider it as the cause of the Southern Earthquake, it’s not strange.’

The Southern Earthquake itself had happened in an instant. However, it took months to deal with the monsters that crawled out from the sea, the subsequent strong currents, and the water that engulfed entire cities.

Furthermore, it took a year for the monsters that thrived in water and excelled in hiding - which appeared frequently after the earthquake - to almost disappear.

A year.

If he thought of it as dealing in an instant with the monsters that had appeared over a year, the amount cut down in eight battles might have been relatively small.

‘Of course, the situations aren’t exactly the same, so it’s difficult to judge everything based on that.’

For Yuder, the key was not the absolute amount. It was the proportion of what they were chipping away on both sides of the scale.

If the weight of the sand on the scale, carefully reduced little by little, decreased but the scale did not move, what did it mean?

It could mean that the amount of sand they thought they had chipped away was still significantly small. Alternatively, it could mean that the ‘sand’ on their side had also been reduced so much that, although the overall size decreased, the weight ratio on both sides remained the same, showing no change. This could be why the cracks hadn’t disappeared despite them effectively killing a considerable number of monsters.

However, there was another reason worth considering.

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Chapter 956

It was speculated that at last, there had been a change in the strange crack, which served as an entrance for the monsters to surge out.

Consider the monsters and the strange crack as grains of rice or beans packed into a bottle or a pouch with a narrow opening. The grains, soaked in water, had become soft and mushy, barely escaping through the small gaps as they stuck together stickily whenever the bottle was shaken.

If such a bottle were turned upside down, naturally, at first, the contents would not come out easily. It required vigorous shaking or stirring inside the bottle to push the contents toward the opening, from where they would emerge in clumps. Given the excessive amount of content, this was to be expected. If one were to think of the first eight times the monsters emerged, what could be said about the ninth?

The smooth flow of the grains from the bottle would only begin when a significant portion of the contents had diminished. From that point, a moderate force or a slight tilt would suffice for the contents to flow out much faster than before.

‘Either way, since the cracks serve as an entrance through which monsters emerge, the reason the time has extended up to the ninth is that some change is finally occurring within the cracks. And if that change is manifested through the monsters’ transformation…’

The lengthy period leading up to the ninth occurrence was by no means insignificant.

And at the same time…

‘The tentacle-like monsters that were emerging might not possess the same solid union as before, and perhaps…’

There might be more than one.

Before he could finish his thought, another tentacle aimed for Yuder's back. With almost superhuman senses, Yuder twisted his body to dodge it. However, he was unable to completely avoid another tentacle that rose from the spot he had evaded and struck him.

Boom. A tentacle as thick as a giant tree smacked his back, and his body fell downwards. As he received the resistance of the water with his entire body, his consciousness momentarily blurred, but Yuder, sensing another tentacle coming from a different direction, exerted his strength desperately.

Swoosh. By a hair's breadth, he twisted his body and narrowly avoided the attack. Several more attacks came in a frenzied manner, but he managed to dodge them all somehow. In fact, the attacks were much slower compared to on land due to the resistance and pressure of the water, but because they were slow, their power felt several times more intense.

"Damn."

Had he not utilized the power of both wind and water to protect his vitals in that instant, his bones would have been damaged or at least his internal organs would have burst. Looking around, he saw that his team members were also frantically alternating between attacking and defending against the attacks from the numerous tentacles.

Yuder confirmed that there were exactly five tentacles.

The number of tentacles being close to the number of cracks was clearly not a coincidence. There was definitely a change in the cracks. A giant mass of monsters that had been blocked and unable to escape properly previously could now come out.

However, these entities lacked the solidity of before, their cohesion weakened, making them more malleable and easily severed by the team member's attacks. Though their speed had increased, this was not entirely to their disadvantage.

'If we are not exhausted, and if we do not panic, that is.'

The enemy’s transformation was both a crisis and an opportunity for them.

Yuder knew he had to turn this into an opportunity by any means necessary.

In the face of the suddenly increased number of tentacles, the team members, taken aback, had yet to fully regain their composure. Those struck by the tentacles struggled desperately, exerting their strength haphazardly, while others, exhausted, floundered to maintain control over their weakened bodies.

Yuder gathered his strength to calm the chaos. One of his eyes glowed fiercely, as if it would go blind, and a massive current started to whirl around him.

Kwaah!

Sensing the unusual current, the tentacles hesitated momentarily, then, like moths drawn to a flame, changed direction toward it. In the dark depths, the sight of the giant tentacles collectively targeting him would have been enough to instill fear in anyone, but Yuder did not flinch and stood alone against them. As he extended his hand, the current he had absorbed suddenly grew, generating a sweeping force that repeated what had been done eight times before.

A giant storm brewed beneath the sea.

The water erupted fiercely, thrashing the five tentacles. Pieces cut off by the members’ attacks screamed as they were swept away by the waves, and the five tentacles began to target Yuder all at once, piercing through the currents.

When there was only one tentacle, the members could block it, but not now. The members continued to attack the tentacles targeting Yuder, but it was impossible to protect him completely as before.

Yuder, while dodging the tentacles that rushed through the massive currents, continued to exert his strength but inevitably allowed a few attacks to hit.

Merely grazing him caused blood to spurt and swell on his limbs, but the currents he summoned did not waver or disappear because of that.

However, the tentacles and the abnormal cracks were not just passively taking it as before.

The currents generated from the five tentacles and cracks started to fiercely entangle with the currents created by Yuder. It was like a massive wave relentlessly crashing into a breakwater, vibrating and causing a tremendous shock to occur in succession.

Rumble!

The darkness veiling his sight, the foam created by the clashing currents, the flashing attacks, all the powers being desperately exerted. The spectacle filling the vast sea looked like a war of stars filling the night sky.

The currents Yuder created were undoubtedly powerful, but in front of the currents stirred up by the monsters, they seemed to be on the verge of being swallowed, crumbling and recovering repeatedly, unsettlingly. As he squeezed out more strength to push it back, pain began to wash over him, along with a dizzying sensation as if all the strength was being drained from his body.

Yuder clenched his teeth and widened his eyes, ignoring the sensation of his muscles being wrung out.

‘I must not be pushed back here. More.’

More!

Responding to his will, the power of water surged, forcefully repelling the tentacles’ attack.

Kwaah!

Unable to withstand the force, one particularly loosely combined tentacle bent halfway, fluttering wildly like a cloth wrapped in the wind. However, the remaining tentacles, and the strange cracks connected to them like roots

deep below, remained steadfast. Approaching the weakened tentacle, Yuder eyed the writhing movements of the remaining ones and thought,

“If I can just sever even one of these fraying tentacles.”

Doing so might instantly overturn the balance of the colliding currents in their favor, but no matter how much strength he poured in, it didn’t work as he wished. Watching the tentacle, fluttering as if it would be severed yet somehow holding its ground, Yuder clenched his teeth. If this continued, the remaining tentacles might protect the fraying one, combining or escaping downward. However, Yuder and his team had already expended much strength to simply watch this happen.

‘They must not be allowed to retreat like this.’

More, even more strength!

It was then that it happened.

As if responding to Yuder’s will, a current, slightly different in nature and more swollen, abruptly interjected itself among the surging currents.

This current, although significantly smaller in size than Yuder’s power, exerted a greater effect upon colliding with the tentacles.

It was as if to Yuder’s storm, which resembled a giant but blunt blade, a smaller but sharply serrated saw had been added. The tentacle began to be finely sliced and pushed back. As Yuder turned his head, he saw, amidst the wildly flailing storm of currents, a faint glimpse of Steiber leading this force.

Despite bleeding from his shoulder, Steiber was raising both hands, controlling the current.

Following him, other weaker water forces began to join Yuder’s power. These were the currents summoned by the other team members. Their handling was clumsy, betraying their unfamiliarity with this method of

power; compared to the massive storm Yuder had conjured, they were but small breezes.

However, when these small forces combined and rode upon Yuder's power, they exerted a strength incomparable to when they stood alone.

Yuder's current, which seemed endlessly fragile and weak in front of the monsters, kept collapsing. But the currents summoned by the others did not crumble so easily. As they entwined and united, supporting each other, something miraculous happened.

The loosely combined tentacle, faced with the currents stirred by Yuder and his team, was finally and utterly ravaged, torn away completely amidst a loud crashing sound.

A shock that felt like it would deafen the eyes and ears.

Waves that seemed to engulf and crash over the entire body.

The crack at the seabed screamed madly and shook violently.

The sea, the earth, the sky, it felt as if the entire world was being torn apart.

It was the moment when the barely maintained balance of the scales finally began to waver.

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Chapter 957

Even in a state of utter confusion, where he could not tell whether his eyes were open or closed, Yuder never ceased his efforts. Enveloped in fierce waves and battered by the onslaught of tentacles, he persisted until the currents he summoned wrapped everything and finally headed toward the surface.

Thus, when the currents, forged by the combined efforts of all, began to fade away towards the distant land, causing the seabed to quake so intensely it seemed as if the earth itself might turn over, and the remaining four tentacles also slowed their movements.

Yuder, his arm swollen from the attack, reached into his bosom and scattered small stone fragments below.

These were magic stones, brought back by his comrades who had gone ashore for a respite. The person who had sent them was none other than Kishiar La Orr, who had heard of Yuder's method of illuminating the seabed. The light-emitting bracelets were made with hastily transported materials, leaving no surplus. However, magic stones were relatively easy to acquire. Although inferior to night stones, they could emit light for a brief moment when struck, which was far better than nothing.

Knowing that recklessly illuminating could put them in danger, Yuder had kept these stones in his possession, waiting for the optimal moment. That moment would be when a significant change occurred among the strange cracks and monsters. He had thought that would be the best time to scatter the magic stones and illuminate the area.

And that moment was now, right here.

The magic stones released from Yuder's hand shattered under the force of the water and exploded. A multicolored light, reminiscent of a fire being lit in a magic stone stove, blinked brightly in the darkness.

It was a moment, far shorter than when he had broken the bracelet filled with night stones.

It lasted only a few seconds, but Yuder’s golden eye did not miss it, swiftly scanning all the sights reflected in the light.

If his eyes were not mistaken, among the tentacles, faint cracks were visible, no longer six in number.

‘…Five!’

The moment Yuder confirmed that the outermost crack had disappeared, an indescribable thrill enveloped him.

The certainty that what he had done was not wrong.

The relief and exhilaration that a solution was finally beginning to emerge.

“…”

And the thing that came to his mind the most after that was the first day of the great southern earthquake that struck like a nightmare long ago.

“There’s been an earthquake off the southern coast, a very big one. The waves have overflowed, submerging most of the coastal areas, and the extent of the damage is still incalculable!”

The earthquake and tsunami off the southern coast had submerged several areas at once, and in an instant, countless lives were lost.

The Southern branch of the Cavalry was too far from the site to respond immediately, and the Southern Army, lacking General Gino, acted chaotically without a system. Duke Herne, who had risen to the rank of Duke from a branch family, was preoccupied with evading responsibility, while the Emperor showed only a cold attitude towards the tragedy in the south, partly because Empress Myra was from there, fueling whispers that it was intentional neglect.

Despite continuous aftershocks and monster attacks, the nobles in the peaceful capital insisted that Yuder, the Commander of the Cavalry, must not be allowed to gain any more merit.

While everyone responded foolishly, precious comrades fell, and the South was utterly devastated, becoming irrecoverable like the West.

In the devastated and submerged southern lands, Yuder encountered countless people who blamed him.

“Why didn’t you, proclaimed as the continent’s greatest Awakener, controlling nature at your whim, appear when you were most needed?” lamented a person, weeping in despair.

“What use is the Cavalry, who only follow the Emperor’s orders and fail to truly protect the empire?” others cursed, spewing venom as if coughing up blood.

“If you had been here that day, you could have stopped that dreadful wave! It’s all your fault!”

Yuder remained silent in the face of their reproaches. Their words were not without truth.

Indeed, he was the strongest Awakener on the continent, but his duties had increasingly become about killing and fighting at the behest of Emperor Katchian. The Emperor proclaimed publicly that the Cavalry and Yudrain Aile were talents moving for the empire, but never actually sent them where they were truly needed.

Ever since the Emperor began to openly oppose his ancestral house, Diarca, Yuder had been too occupied protecting the Emperor and warding off intensified attacks from political adversaries to properly visit the Cavalry. Most operational tasks were delegated to Deputy Commanders and branch leaders, with Yuder only able to read final reports.

As a result, when disaster needing him struck, Yuder couldn’t be there.

Until then, he had thought that focusing all his efforts on maintaining the Cavalry was the most important duty as its Commander. Yudrain Aile's failure was the Cavalry's failure, and their failure was akin to the failure of all Awakeners, darkening the future of all who might become Awakeners.

Therefore, Emperor Katchian's trust was essential. The Emperor needed the Cavalry to govern the country properly, and Yuder believed he just needed to loyally follow his commands - not a particularly difficult problem.

But it was not so simple.

The southern earthquake became a turning point for Yuder, prompting him to revisit matters he had overlooked. Although the Emperor urged him to return quickly, Yuder delayed, making various excuses. Instead, he gathered information from before and after the earthquake, devoting all his efforts to recovery.

They said that natural disasters were beyond human control, but was that truly so? Was this terrible calamity indeed beyond anyone's response or prediction?

It was then that he began to seek out witnesses who had seen the strange cracks, feeling the need to track and clearly recognize their existence for the first time.

People scorned him, calling him a Commander chasing useless rumors instead of doing his duty, a madman who couldn't accept his failure.

The southern earthquake was, arguably, the first step towards Yudrain Aile's march towards death.

Those memories, unknown to anyone else, now blurred through Yuder's eyelids. He calmed his heart, pounding as if it would burst, and communicated to his comrades using short vibrational waves and hand signals through the power of water.

"Strange cracks, one confirmed extinguished."

In his previous life, he made numerous mistakes. Among all the errors and failures, the southern earthquake was a burden that weighed heavily on his heart.

But now, Yuder knew the cause of the earthquake and the means to resolve it. From this moment on, he was determined to do everything possible to accomplish what he couldn’t do back then.

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Unsettling earthquakes continued to rumble until, at last, the sea began to churn. The frothing and undulating surface signaled the arrival of a current bearing monsters, just as it had eight times before.

However, unlike the previous currents, this one was unnaturally large and immense.

“Whoooooosh!”

“What… what is that?”

Before the astonished eyes of the team members emerged not the usual small, fragmented monsters, but a creature of incomparable size, a tentacled behemoth. The sight of its enormity, arriving amidst the smaller monsters, shocked the members, but they soon began to engage as instructed.

But facing a creature of such immense size was overwhelming. How many more of these could possibly be lurking in the depths?

Overwhelmed by the mere thought, they exhaled wearily. Struggling against the rough gravel and sinking sand, they chastised and encouraged one another, but the battle continuing in the darkness of the night was anything but easy.

“Argh!”

One of the exhausted, Emon from the Southern Army’s Special Forces, clenched his teeth and wiped his sweat. His ankle, injured in a previous stumble, was not in good shape. Just as he thought it was getting better and

his mind briefly hazed, a monster’s attack loomed right before his nose. Startled, he swung his hand to produce flames, but his fire veered off, absurdly missing its target.

‘Damn it. Looks like I’m going to take a hit!’

Had Sunz, the one with the power of vision, been there, such an attack would have been avoidable, but he was in another region. As Emon, gripping the dagger’s handle, widened his eyes in a desperate attempt, a sudden black shadow sprang from somewhere, snatching the monster and hurling it away.

“Are you okay?”

The one who precisely caught and supported Emon, who nearly fell, inquired with a clear voice. Emon recognized who it was.

“Uh… Deputy Commander of the Cavalry, Jung Division?”

“Yes. You’re in bad shape. Stop being stubborn and move back.”

“What?”

“Why didn’t you say anything about your ankle? Cavalry are Cavalry, and the Imperial Army is the Imperial Army. Enduring pain doesn’t breed pride, so why endure?”

“…”

Kanna knew that Emon had been stubbornly enduring, ashamed to appear weaker than the Cavalry, who still had much strength left.

‘How, how did she know?’

While Emon blinked in astonishment, not yet fully understanding Kanna’s abilities, she pushed him toward the back.

“Gakane! Please take over.”

“Sure. I’ll take him to the tent where the priests are, right?”

“Just a moment! I can still hold on……!”

“Ha ha. Don’t tell me that, go and talk over there!”

Before Emon could finish his words, the sprouting shadow wrapped around him, forcibly moving him to the tent where the priests were. His struggles were futile.

‘What the heck is going on?’

Upon arrival, Emon realized he was not the only one who had been forcibly brought there.

Everyone, without exception, sat dazedly with tired eyes, looking as incredulous as if they were seeing their own reflections in a mirror.

“You… You were also sent here by the Jung Division Deputy Commander and that shadow user?”

“You too?”

“Ah… I was also brought here by Kanna and Gakane…”

It was absurd, but sitting among the priests and observing the situation, a realization dawned on him. With those whose spirits had faded and who had been stubbornly resisting despite the risk of severe injury now isolated, the atmosphere at the site of the battle seemed to have transformed, becoming more efficient and orderly.

As their numbers dwindled, they appeared to be retreating under pressure from the enemy. Yet, this retreat, seemingly preordained, was executed so smoothly and methodically that it almost seemed planned.

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Chapter 958

Facing a significantly increased number of monsters, which have even grown larger in size, while the number of personnel to respond has decreased, would under normal circumstances be extremely dangerous.

Yet, what about now?

“Those who have retreated, come this way.”

Falling back, back, behind the breakwater, the diminished ranks turned their heads, following a command that resonated clearly and stuck in their ears without needing to be loudly shouted. Only Nathan Zuckerman, standing at the entrance of the densely grown forest over the past few days, spoke with an expressionless face, holding his sword.

“Enter the forest and climb up the trees!”

As the humans retreated not toward the town but toward the forest on the other side of the town, the monsters naturally pursued them. However, what the monsters encountered there were traps they could never have anticipated.

“They’re here. Drop them!”

The retreating members and the imperial army soldiers quickly climbed the trees and hid themselves, while the soldiers who had been waiting above threw the nets they were holding.

“Throw further, with all your might! With that kind of strength, what could you catch, fish?!”

At the seashore, where anyone could easily find old nets, traps were made by attaching heavy stones to the ends of these nets, engulfing and entangling the monsters, effectively immobilizing them all at once.

The soldiers waiting in the trees were from the Charloin Security Force, none of them possessing any special powers, just ordinary individuals. Their strength was incomparably inferior to that of the well-trained southern army.

But they were locals who had lived their entire lives on the Charloin coast. Handling tools made of nets was something they could do more easily than those from other regions.

“Kill the monsters trapped in the nets!”

While the smaller monsters struggled in the nets, those who had climbed up the trees exerted their strength to kill them. Those who could throw weapons did so, and even those who couldn’t, used their strength in whatever way they could to help.

Of course, the most helpful was one person, Marin, who seemed to have the entire domain of the trees at her disposal.

“If you feel like you’re going to fall, just don’t move! I can quickly grow the branches!”

Standing at the top of the tallest tree, she sweated profusely, protecting the tree branches where the members were hanging and growing them, preventing the monsters’ approach. There were still quite a few monsters not entangled in the nets, but in the forest full of trees and not water, they were merely floundering, unable to demonstrate their previously formidable stealth abilities.

Had the exhausted personnel remained, they would have hindered each other, making it impossible to execute the command to retreat and climb the trees so quickly and easily. The reduced number of personnel turned out to be an advantage in this situation, as there is nothing more advantageous for a small group than fighting in a forest full of trees.

However, there was still the largest enemy remaining on the seashore.

The tentacle, which looked like a long, combined mass of the monsters they had faced so far, was still alive despite the members' fervent attacks, as if it was made of dough.

To be precise, the entire colony that made up the creature hadn't died, so it was still alive and moving. Parts of it were burnt black or battered to tatters, but it still writhed and bubbled with grotesque movements, stirring a primal disgust in humans.

Most of the personnel had disappeared into the tents housing the priests or the forest, leaving Kishiar to look up at the situation with an air of calmness, free from any tension. He had been the one who, while others fought and retreated, had held back the colossal monster, ensuring it could not move from its spot.

Kishiar, avoiding the monster's attacks accompanied by indescribable horrific sounds, leaped up, evading smoothly while casting glances around. Hellem hid herself in a safe zone behind a pile of monster corpses, while Kanna and Gakane, after admirably fulfilling their roles, waited for the right moment to retreat to another location.

In the tent set up on the hill, occupied by priests, the wounded and exhausted lay receiving treatment. With a reduced number of personnel retreating into the forest, the battle continued, but Nathan Zuckerman stood firmly holding the ground.

At a glance, the scene appeared to have suffered incomparable damage compared to before. However, there is a limit to retreating in a crisis. The fact that there were almost no seriously injured was, in truth, the best and most optimal outcome.

Though the situation in other regions was still unknown, he wasn't too worried, seeing how the members, now significantly grown, could find their roles without needing to be commanded.

'Having a reliable hand to play is most effective in moments like these.'

Until just before, he had prioritized ensuring that others were not harmed, focusing on delaying rather than killing. But now, there was no need for that.

And what that meant was…

“Now, I can focus on making my move without worrying about my surroundings.”

Kiiiiiiii!

The man, avoiding the monster that targeted him and spat an unknown liquid, lightly spun in the air and landed gracefully. His landing spot was none other than on top of the monster.

“The one who sent you here must have believed I would handle you well, and I dislike failing to meet expectations. There’s also something I’ve been wanting to test out.”

“___!”

The monster, belatedly noticing the enemy’s movements, started thrashing about violently in an attempt to throw Kishiar off. Yet, even as the breakwater and ground cracked from the impact, the man remained unshaken as if his feet were glued.

Even his torn clothing and disheveled hair seemed, in his calmness, like deliberately styled elements.

Thump, Bang! Bang!

He elegantly stepped across the monster’s body, which glowed and contorted in anger, like one would ascend the grand staircase of a palace, slowly tightening his grip on his sword. A bright blue aura rippled around the blade, while an invisible mist wrapped around his other hand.

He was now wielding both the power of aura and that of an Awakener. Yuder, had he seen this, would have doubted his eyes.

‘The most significant characteristic of this monster is that it’s made of small pieces combined to form one large group.’

As a result, it was extremely difficult to kill it in one go. As long as even one piece of its body remained alive, it could continue to move as if it was not completely dead. When it was smaller, it wasn’t too difficult to handle, but now that it had formed into a large mass, this trait had unfortunately become more pronounced. Even if several members attacked it together, only a part of it would be destroyed, moving as if it hadn’t been damaged at all, drastically reducing the efficiency of the battle.

With small monsters also not remaining idle while the members were fighting the large one, this was the worst possible situation for the exhausted members.

‘But, on the contrary, if you think about it… its weakness cannot escape from there either.’

Kishiar stood at the very center of the glowing monster, raising his sword upside down. This spot was also the area where traces of a wound were already present from the time it first emerged out of the water and revealed itself.

Although the attack had been weak, only slightly opening a part of its outer skin, the wound was oddly large and wide for such an assault.

Even someone as powerful as Yuder, who inevitably weakened in front of the monster, couldn’t have made such a peculiar mark, the man thought.

“My assistant is quite considerate. It’s as if he left it here, telling me where to attack.”

Of course, it was an absurd notion, but there was no one there to hear and react to these words.

Kishiar, standing on the monster’s skin, did not hesitate to thrust his divine sword, Orr, into the small, horrifying creatures that opened their mouths wide to attack him.

Kiiiaaaa!

Perhaps because it was a collective scream, the monster’s cry sounded like hundreds, thousands screaming simultaneously.

The deeply stabbed monster glowed even more intensely, shaking Kishiar’s body, but he paid it no mind and exerted strength in his hand holding the sword. The hand imbued with his Awakener power then touched the opened skin. An invisible force, together with the aura, began to penetrate relentlessly into the monster’s skin, aiming for its interior.

What would happen if he made the deepest cut possible with the aura that claimed to slice through anything, and then mixed it with his Awakener ability to ‘push out’ everything?

In truth, he had already tested a similar method of attack against smaller monsters. The act of ‘pushing out’ the individual pieces that made up the collective seemed feasible, but the tough skin enveloping it needed to be sufficiently cut for less effort. However, this was an inefficient method when dealing with hundreds, thousands of small monsters.

But against this colossal monster, there was no need to worry about that.

If successful, it would be possible to cut off the entire connection of the collective making up this massive monster in one fell swoop.

‘I still can’t predict the aftermath.’

Yet, Kishiar willingly attempted it.

That was a method that would have been committed by someone who took the risk of cutting it up and sending it to him.

A bright blue light swelled instantaneously along the blade. As the light expanded within the sword piercing the transparent insides of the monster, the surroundings, for a moment, appeared to be bathed in a bright blue hue.

The light, refracted and spread through the monster’s skin, was so brilliant that it could be seen from the tents of the priests in the distance, the forest,

and even further out at sea.

And finally, when the light swelled to its limit -

With an immense sound, everything burst forth.

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Chapter 959

“Commander!”

“Duke Peletta, Your Highness!”

Exhausted, the unit members and the imperial soldiers, along with everyone else who had been lying down receiving treatment, abruptly gasped for air and stood up. It was no surprise given the immense explosion that occurred, alarming even the usually calm and trusting members of the Cavalry. Some had even been caught trying to use their abilities to escape.

However, when the burst of light vanished and the explosion subsided,

Everyone was astounded, not only by the unblemished appearance of the man standing before them but by the significance of what they witnessed.

“How can this be…….”

Despite being closest to the explosion, Kishiar appeared completely unharmed as if nothing had happened. However, the area immediately surrounding him was the only clean spot; everywhere else was covered in the exploded remains of monsters, to the extent that the ground was no longer visible.

Amid the barely wriggling remains, the man stood unscathed, his appearance immaculate. The chillingly blue blade he held evoked ancient legends in the minds of those who saw it.

All present knew that Kishiar, Duke of Peletta, was an Awakener and the newly revealed swordmaster. Yet, there are moments when what one thinks they know is realized to be nothing at all. This was one such moment.

Gazing at the figure standing against the night’s darkness, people felt a shiver run down their spines.

Why had they ever thought he was someone to worry about after witnessing his splitting of the sea?

They felt ashamed for even having such thoughts momentarily, as he seemed like a monumental figure, transcending something unfathomable, akin to a colossal mountain.

The man's hair, looking towards the sea, tangled in the wind like threads of gold. People suddenly became acutely aware of the inherent weight of his lineage and the existence of the divine sword Orr that he wielded.

"Oh… Almighty."

Several devout followers of the Sun God and priests spontaneously knelt and clasped their hands in prayer. Some murmured prayers somewhere. It was almost impossible for them not to be overwhelmed by a scene that resembled a painting of a holy moment.

"Commander."

The moment of silence, maintained by no one daring to approach Kishiar, was broken when Kanna and Gakane returned from a safe place.

"This is all……. How could this……."

Gakane, like others, was shocked at the sight of the monster remains scattered around, but Kanna's expression was relatively calm and determined. Her ability to process information had turned even this astonishing sight into something she could understand.

"Commander. I'm relieved you're safe!"

Finally, the man who had been gazing towards the sea turned around. The face within the line of sight, the gaze, was exactly that of Commander Kishiar, whom they knew well.

"I'm glad you all returned without any injuries. Thanks to your timely intervention, the damage was much less than expected. I appreciate your excellent judgment."

“That’s too kind of you. I believe there’s still much to be done before I deserve such praise.”

“That may be so.”

Kishiar smiled. At that moment, Kanna felt the tension she had been holding release.

To feel fear in the presence of Kishiar was illogical. She had understood intellectually that he had managed everything on his own, but emotionally, she had been overwhelmed and subdued by the enormity of it all.

‘…But how could I not? Especially after witnessing such a thing.’

Throughout her time with the Cavalry, she had seen her fair share of incredible sights. Starting with her closest friend, Yuder Aile, who was a monstrous being beyond normal standards. However, the emotions she felt now, compared to when she had first seen Yuder’s power, were subtly different.

When Yuder exerted his power deliberately, those who witnessed it felt a reverence akin to standing before a vast, unchallengeable force of nature. It was similar to the feeling of insignificance one might have in the face of mountains, seas, storms, and earthquakes - phenomena beyond human control.

Yet, today, standing before their Commander, who single-handedly split the sea and obliterated a monster with one blow, they felt an awe reserved for something far beyond human comprehension. Even Kanna, who had lived most of her life with scant regard for faith, found herself thinking of words like God, holy figures, or the ancient emperors in the presence of Kishiar. What more for others?

“On my way here, I surveyed the situation in the forest. It seems the battle is nearing its end without any serious injuries, thanks to everyone’s efforts, including Sir Zuckerman.”

“That’s fortunate.”

“I’ve also gathered information that there were no major issues near where the mages are stationed. Signals have been sent confirming their safety. There’s no need for worry there.”

“And?”

“And… it seems someone will be coming from the sea soon, if my abilities haven’t dulled.”

Kanna smiled sheepishly. Despite having honed her skills through rigorous training to an unparalleled level compared to before, reading and categorizing countless people while on the move had been an arduous task. So much so that her nose bled, startling Gakane, by the time she retreated.

‘Fortunately, the bleeding stopped quickly…’

“If you say so, then it must be true.”

Kishiar agreed with Kanna’s words without a hint of doubt, his face as calm as if he were the one who had gathered all the information.

Soon, just as Kanna had predicted, someone sliced through the water from the sea, rapidly approaching. It was a Cavalry member using the power of water.

Upon seeing the beach littered with monster remains, the member was initially shocked but quickly ignored it and stepped over them to approach Kishiar, bowing his head.

“Commander, news from the seabed. One of the six anomalous cracks has been extinguished! Yuder himself confirmed and relayed the information. It’s certain.”

“…Wow!”

Gakane almost let out a cheer, clenching his eyes shut, but managed to restrain himself, swallowing his words. However, Kanna, the reporting member, and everyone else shared the same overwhelming sentiment.

‘Finally!’

Kishiar too seemed momentarily surprised by the good news, blinking before exhaling deeply and smiling. It was a smile brighter and somehow more poignant than before.

“Is that so? Finally… How are those who struggled beneath the sea? Any injured?”

“There are quite a few injuries… but luckily, the priests on the ship say they can be healed. Yuder was also injured this time… He hadn’t come up to the surface when I left for here.”

At this, the expressions of the reporting member, Gakane, and Kanna all darkened instantly. Everyone had tried to ensure Yuder wasn’t injured, like during the hailstorm, but Kanna felt a particular sense of guilt among them.

Despite her unease, Kanna could not express her concerns when even Commander Kishiar remained unflinchingly calm.

‘Since Yuder hasn’t come up, it must be a minor injury, right? He’s stubborn enough to ignore even a serious injury and keep going… But Steiber wouldn’t just leave him be if it were serious.’

Yuder, known for his relentless nature, did show some deference to the elders, a trait Kanna suspected stemmed from his upbringing under his grandfather’s guidance. Steiber, the oldest and most amiable member of the Cavalry, always prioritized safety. Kanna wanted to believe that if Yuder was seriously hurt, Steiber wouldn’t just stand by idly.

“And there’s one more message from below the sea.”

“What is it?”

“I’m sorry to say, but it seems the tenth… is about to happen.”

Silence fell upon hearing this. The ninth had just passed, and now the tenth was imminent. Despite the good news of one crack closing, a sense of dread was inevitable.

Yet, despite the members' tense reactions, Kishiar remained composed. He patted the member's shoulder with a smile, advising him to get treated and return, before turning away.

"Let's get ready."

His posture was still upright, his grip on the sword steady and unwavering. Looking at his hand, which seemed even firmer than during the hailstorm, Kanna felt a strange yet familiar sensation.

'The Commander now reminds me of Yuder in some way.'

"The upcoming battles will be centered around Marin's Forest. You can retreat further if necessary. I'll continue to guard this place, so you all do what you deem necessary."

"Understood!"

Preparing for the tenth with their current manpower would be challenging, even with those who had received treatment and returned. However, no one questioned Kishiar's orders.

Moments later, the tenth wave arrived.

The smaller monsters were dealt with by those in Marin's Forest, while Kishiar handled the giant tentacle, as before. News arrived that the second crack had closed.

Then came the eleventh wave, followed by the closure of the third crack.

The twelfth wave surged in, and the fourth crack closed. After handling the thirteenth wave, everyone was exhausted, but they cheered upon hearing that the fifth crack had been sealed.

Only one crack remained.

The night, filled with the stench of blood, slowly gave way to dawn.

However, as they awaited what was expected to be the fourteenth and final wave, Kishiar received new information from below the sea.

“Commander. The size of the remaining monsters has exceeded expectations. Yuder asks if you can prepare ‘the second method.”

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Chapter 960

“Commander. The size of the remaining monsters has exceeded expectations. Yuder asks if you can prepare ‘the second method.”

“…”

Kishiar, before responding, took a long, sweeping glance around him.

Their surroundings were mired with piled-up fragments of monster carcasses, so much so that their feet were submerged. The stench was unbearable. With no time to properly dispose of the bodies, they were haphazardly scraped together and burned on carts. The noxious smoke billowing from not far away had continued for hours, causing many to faint.

Those who had endured and remained were far from being unscathed. The members and soldiers, who had fought tirelessly throughout the day without rest, were almost delirious due to exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and the aftermath of their spent abilities.

The situation would have been far worse had Kanna not begun isolating those whose condition worsened after the ninth wave. By the time the thirteenth wave hit, she had been carried away by Lusan, nose bleeding incessantly.

Those in other regions were slightly better off, not having to face the massive tentacles, but their plight was the same, having fought through the night. Ever in Mclara, who managed the distribution of strength better than others and thus held out longer, Kurga, who leveraged his knowledge of the South to firmly take charge of Tuban and Sluban, and Sunz, who was using his vision abilities consecutively in Alsara-a place Yuder had particularly worried about for its geographical vulnerabilities-also received reports of having fainted several times.

The medical unit, soldiers, and mages were no exception. Alik and the mages were so short of magic tools they had to produce more on the spot.

Lusan had already exceeded his limits, showing signs of divine power depletion. Myra, who had tirelessly rallied the Southern forces and dispatched aid where needed, and General Gino, who generously provided support and troops even while dealing with traitors within the Southern army, were equally exhausted.

Yet no one dared complain, knowing there was someone who had not emerged even once from the deep sea during this crisis.

And now, that person had sought Kishiar's help, sensing the end was near.

"Cavalry Commander, what exactly is this 'second method'?" Emon asked cautiously, unaware of what it entailed. Thanks to Kanna, he had retreated in time for treatment and had held up relatively well, despite his body being battered by the monster's toxic fluids.

Kishiar opened his mouth with a faint smile.

"… Think of it as if asking me if I can come there."

"Commander… You mean, into the sea?"

"Yes."

To prevent a repeat of the previous game's southern earthquake, Kishiar and Yuder had devised a three-phase contingency plan. Yuder's request was part of the second phase.

-If it is deemed that Kishiar's strength is needed more than his leadership, he will join Yuder for a direct response.-

The people looked bewildered, unable to guess what Kishiar could possibly do in the sea. Some showed signs of panic and unease at the prospect of his absence from command.

In that moment, it was evident that Nathan Zuckerman, Commander Kishiar's steadfast adjutant who had supported him more than anyone else, shared similar concerns. Wiping the grime off his soot-blackened chin, he spoke in a low voice.

“Are you sure you’ll be alright, my lord?”

To Nathan Zuckerman, at least, it was clear that his lord’s condition was not as unblemished or fine as it appeared to others. To be frank, Kishiar had shown an almost unnaturally robust demeanor despite having expended a tremendous amount of energy for an extended period, yet it didn’t mean his vessel had suddenly become as durable as steel.

Kishiar had used his aura and the power of an Awakener excessively throughout the day. He had cleverly exhausted other powers as well, in an attempt to maintain balance in his vessel, but it was uncertain how effective this had been.

Recalling the times when his lord, even after becoming an Awakener, had struggled with the overflowing power within his vessel, Nathan Zuckerman spoke cautiously.

“You’ve only recently recovered from the day of the hailstorm. If there’s an alternative that doesn’t require you, my lord, to overexert yourself…”

“Well, I did push myself a bit,” Kishiar casually agreed with his adjutant.

“But Nathan, this time there is no alternative. I didn’t die then, and I have been fine up until now. I won’t die this time either, so don’t worry. I’ll return safely. Take good care of things here for me.”

The man who was as tall as his adjutant patted his head as if he were a younger brother and then began inspecting the sword he held. Nathan Zuckerman, witnessing such a calm demeanor, inadvertently blurted out another question.

“How can you be so sure? No matter how formidable the strength you, my lord, possess, isn’t there always a possibility of the unexpected?”

There was no guarantee of safety just because he had survived before. From the standpoint of an adjutant who knew how miraculously he had survived to this point, it was inevitable to worry about his lord possibly sustaining even graver injuries than during the hailstorm.

Kishiar stopped wiping his sword and looked up, his face, which had been devoid of smiles due to the weight of the situation, suddenly softened with a smile.

“That’s quite a childlike question you’re asking. Were you that worried when I lay bedridden last time?”

“I know it’s a question a knight shouldn’t ask.”

A knight follows his lord’s decisions to the end. So, this was more akin to the attitude of a servant who had served him for a long time. It was unusual for Nathan Zuckerman, who was often praised as the epitome of knighthood.

However, Kishiar, uncharacteristically, did not rebuke Nathan Zuckerman. Instead, he lowered his voice, playfully like a young prince.

“Alright. Then, shall I tell you why I’m confident that I’ll return unharmed?”

“…”

“There’s someone in that sea who risked everything to save me.”

The words were light and playful, yet the gravity they carried was so immense that it left the listener speechless, unable to reply. Despite not understanding precisely what it meant, the sheer weight of it was so profound that it was beyond comprehension.

“The truth is, it’s not just about saving me. But as long as there’s someone out there, who doesn’t hesitate to risk everything for what they wish to save, I will not die here.”

In the silence, Nathan Zuckerman saw an ocean filling his lord’s eyes.

Throughout all the moments of slaying monsters and frantically issuing orders, he realized only now that he had been fixated solely on that one place.

“But what does it matter, even if it’s difficult to return unscathed? He is calling me. That reason alone is sufficient for me to leave.”

“…”

“…My lord!”

Just then, someone called out to them urgently from behind. It was Hellem, accompanied by others. With her were none other than Mick Shuden, the owner of the Shuden Trading Company, and the Eldore siblings.

“I apologize for the delay in responding to your call. We’ve just arrived!”

Mick, unlike his usual sluggish demeanor, immediately bowed his head. His darkened eyes and the unkempt beard suggested he had rushed here without even a moment to shave. Hellem, seemingly understanding, shrugged her shoulders and spoke up.

“He was delayed because the conditions around the south were unfavorable. Fortunately, he met someone who helped him arrive faster.”

Mick, who had struggled to enter Charloin quickly due to the near-blockade in the southern region, had tried to find a shortcut by detouring through other areas. It was the Eldore siblings who met him and offered their help, aiding in the movement of other members in different regions.

Despite their exhaustion, they managed to utilize their abilities to their limits and successfully transported Mick to Charloin almost instantly.

While it may have only saved a little time, that shortened duration proved to be incredibly valuable to them in their current situation.

Kishiar glanced for a moment at the nearly collapsing Eldore siblings gasping for breath, then turned his head.

“Mick. It’s truly fortunate to meet you before leaving.”

“You said you needed my abilities. What would you have me see? The monster, or……”

“The sea.”

“Pardon?”

“I’d like you to accompany me and observe the sea. To see what lies beneath it, exactly as it appears.”

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Chapter 961

“I’d like you to accompany me and observe the sea. To see what lies beneath it, exactly as it appears.”

Even though Mick Shuden had only just arrived, his merchant’s intuition allowed him to grasp the severity of the current situation quite well. If he hadn’t understood how dangerous the situation was after hearing the stories on his way here and witnessing the scenes upon arrival, he would have been a fool. Yet, without any hesitation, he readily agreed to the suggestion to go to a potentially life-threatening place.

“Understood. It’s been a while since I’ve been on a ship.”

Kishiar’s lips curved into a smile.

“I’m sorry, but we won’t be taking a ship.”

Before Mick could express his confusion at this statement, Kishiar turned around. He singled out a young man with striking red hair, who stood out among the crowd.

“Gakane Bolunwald.”

“Yes? Yes!”

Gakane, who had remained at the forefront even after sending off Kanna, lifted his head in surprise.

“After I depart for the sea, I plan to leave the overall command here to Adjutant Nathan Zuckerman. However, since he’s not an Awakener, we need someone else to lead the Cavalry. Kanna Wand, who would normally take on this role, hasn’t returned yet. So, I’ll entrust you with the temporary command until Kanna returns.”

“Me, to command the Cavalry?”

Gakane’s eyes trembled uncontrollably.

“There must be someone more suitable than me…”

He looked around in panic, but none of the remaining members wanted to meet his gaze. He realized that none of the three Deputy Commanders, including Kanna, were present, and Kurga, responsible for the southern branch, was also away, leaving no obvious candidate.

“You’ve already successfully led others in the Western territories to investigate the Great Sarain Forest. You know Kanna and Nathan well enough, so there’s no one better suited for this.”

Indeed, he had been secretly learning swordsmanship from Nathan Zuckerman, making him the most knowledgeable about Nathan among the Cavalry members, apart from Yuder. Who else would be better to convey opinions between Kanna at the medical unit and Nathan Zuckerman? Finding no reason to oppose, Gakane, sweating profusely, closed his mouth as Kishiar smiled.

“I’m not asking if you can do it. It’s an order. You must do it for those who haven’t returned yet.”

Understanding the weight of those words, Gakane clenched his eyes shut and then opened them. He thought of Yuder, still enduring the unimaginable dangers at the bottom of the sea, and Kanna, swallowing continuous nosebleeds while trying to save even one more person.

As he remembered the faces of these two, his feelings of panic and fear receded.

“Yes. I understand.”

He took a deep breath, slapped his cheeks audibly, and saluted.

“I will do my utmost!”

“Good.”

Kishiar patted the rigid shoulder of Gakane and turned away.

“Mick, let’s go now.”

“Ah. Yes.”

Mick quickly followed behind Kishiar. At the end of the breakwater, a member who wielded the power of water, who had come to report to Kishiar, was waiting.

“Really? There’s no ship…? How do you plan to go…?”

“Just walk after me.”

As Kishiar finished speaking, without a moment’s hesitation, he leaped off the end of the breakwater. He then stood on the surface of the sea with ease, as if he possessed the power of water like some of his members. Yuder would have understood that Kishiar was merely pushing the surface of the water with his feet, but others, unaware of the reason, were naturally shocked.

“Uh… uh!”

“Could the Commander use the power of water?”

Mick, his mouth agape like the others, soon had a flash of realization in his eyes. Although he didn’t understand Kishiar’s abilities as clearly as Yuder, his ability to see the essence allowed him to grasp somehow how Kishiar stood on the water.

“Ah… so that’s it. Um, huh. Just like in Peletta, you really know how to surprise people.”

“Afraid to come down?”

“If I said no, it would be a lie. But I’d rather not be kicked down by Hellem. So… I’m coming down!”

Mick clenched his eyes shut and jumped off the breakwater. His feet, too, landed properly on the sea as if pushed by something. Kishiar, who observed this without a change in his expression despite using his remarkable power, spoke up with a gesture.

“It seems we don’t have time to delay any further. Let’s depart immediately.”

“Ah… understood.”

The member who wielded the power of water, just as surprised as the others, descended to the sea and started to run swiftly as if flying. Kishiar followed suit with large strides. Although he didn’t seem to be walking very fast, he quickly moved ahead, prompting Mick to run hastily after him.

“My Lord! Are you leaving me behind?”

His loud voice soon got swallowed by the mist and disappeared over the sea. Those left on the shore couldn’t take their eyes off the unbelievable scene for a long time until they finally regained their senses.

“Alright! Now that the Commander has gone to the sea, we can’t be careless anymore. Everyone, stay alert!”

Gakane, with a deliberately bright voice, refreshed the attention of his comrades and took one last glance over the sea as dawn approached.

‘…May they all return safely.’

-

Yuder floated in the water, staring at the pitch-black shadow cast below him.

Rumble… Rumble…

The last remaining abnormal crack, ominously silent and vibrating, yet giving off no signs. He had to use most of the remaining magic stones to assess its condition.

The conclusion he arrived at was not particularly welcome.

‘The last remaining crack isn’t like the others that formed in the water; it seems to be half-buried in the ground.’

The other five cracks that had vanished were indeed at the bottom of the sea but still existed within the water. However, this last remaining crack was literally buried at the very bottom.

Until now, it was cunningly overlapped with other cracks, so its true nature wasn’t clearly discerned. ‘If anything was to vanish, it should have been that one first. Why is the last remaining crack that one?’

With the crack half-buried, it inevitably caused more severe vibrations whenever monsters tried to escape from it. Yuder thought that the tremors that had been happening were mostly due to this last crack being the most direct and significant cause. Not only that, but with part of the crack blocked, the monsters couldn’t escape as easily as from the other cracks, and for some reason, the movements of the last remaining cluster of monsters seemed unusually troubling.

‘The exit they need to escape through must be much smaller than before, so that makes sense.’

Despite the significant amount of tentacles already eliminated, beyond the crack, there still lurked a mass large enough to produce at least a couple more. Their frantic movements, as they fiercely clung and collided in an attempt to escape through the narrow crack, ironically prevented the proper formation of new tentacles. This was the current predicament.

‘But, based on our experience so far, it’s only a matter of time before they emerge. And if that remaining mass escapes all at once…’

It would certainly turn the land upside down.

In other words, a submarine earthquake was inevitable.

Given that only one crack remained, such an event, though severe, could be less catastrophic than if all six cracks had erupted. However, the current manpower was grossly insufficient to confront the most dangerously located crack and the remaining monsters, even if it was the last one.

‘Everyone is too injured and exhausted. We’ve reached our limit.’

Turning his head, Yuder saw shadows floating like nearly lifeless bodies. They were members who lacked the strength to even maintain their posture, merely entrusting their bodies to the water and breathing.

Although they received divine power from the priests and were wrapped in special magic bandages resistant to water, these could not restore the extreme physical exhaustion and depleted abilities to their limits.

To Yuder, asking these remnants to confront the last crack was tantamount to sending some to their deaths.

‘It’s not a situation where we can assure significant results even after taking such risks.’

This predicament, arriving just as they were nearing the end, seemed to mock all their efforts so far.

In the past, Yuder might have felt a sense of futility and despair. However, when he confirmed the state of the crack, the face that came to mind was Kishiar’s.

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Chapter 962

In the past, Yuder might have felt a sense of futility and despair. However, when he confirmed the state of the crack, the face that came to mind was Kishiar's.

When an event beyond their capacity to handle erupted, Yuder had planned to seek Kishiar's aid. Perhaps, now was that very moment. But could he really ask for more from someone who had already spent a whole day exerting their strength in battle?

'…He might be at his limit now.'

Yuder still vividly remembered the thrill he felt when he heard that Kishiar was at the forefront, dealing with the monsters. Frankly, he regretted not being able to see it with his own eyes.

He knew that Yuder had sent the monster his way, understanding the significance of that gesture. Despite the distance, the moment he realized this, Yuder felt as if he were right there with him.

However, the fact that Kishiar had taken the lead in battle also meant that he had overexerted himself. Had he ever displayed his abilities continuously for such an extended period before?

'Probably not.'

It was impossible to know the exact condition of the vessel, but if it was in a bad state and still being overexerted, calling him here might not change anything. It was even hard to be certain if he could come at all.

What would be the best course of action in such a situation?

The Yuder of the past would have sent the others away and charged into the crack alone, considering it the best solution. By gathering all his remaining

strength and using both water and earth powers, he might not completely stop the disaster, but he could reduce the damage.

Of course, he couldn’t avoid the monsters in the process, and his own body would suffer. But if his sacrifice could prevent the repetition of the Southern Earthquake’s history, it seemed like a not-so-bad solution.

‘But now… I don’t think that’s the best way.’

Yuder closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

In the past, he had briefly been imprisoned in Tainu’s jail, taking the blame alone to minimize the damage to the Cavalry and resolve the situation efficiently. During a secret visit, Kishiar, not angry at Yuder’s decision, had said:

“You’re going to say this was the best option. I know. No need to apologize. But next time, I’ll make you think there’s a better choice.”

Back then, Yuder hadn’t fully understood what those other choices meant, nor had he tried to find out.

But now.

‘…I’m actually trying to find those other choices myself.’

In a situation where despair was justified, he strangely didn’t feel much of it. It was distinctly different from the calm he felt in the face of immense frustration during the day of the hail.

Yuder realized anew that he had changed significantly since the day of the hail. Naturally, Kishiar played a big part in that change, but now the Cavalry was also included in that influence.

Who could have imagined that Kishiar’s words about finding a better way would come true now, here, in this manner?

People could change in just a month. Not just Yuder, but the members in front of him, and Kishiar, who was tirelessly fighting on the land, were no

different.

Standing in the rain that fell like mist, one doesn’t initially realize its weight. But upon regaining awareness, one finds themselves completely drenched. To Yuder, the changes he was experiencing felt akin to that sensation.

Thunderous vibrations echoed once more. The rippling waves tingled his skin, alerting him to imminent danger.

His nerves, sharp and on edge throughout, seemed to burn out, screaming an unclear warning. A high-pitched tinnitus, impossible to hear under the water-logged ears, seemed to tear through his head.

This sensation sharply reawakened his dulled consciousness, clearing away the complex thoughts that clouded his mind.

‘…Right.’

Yuder fixed his gaze on the darkness beneath his feet, steeling his resolve. He turned his head and sent a signal to his team members using the power of water.

“Everyone, gather.”

The exhausted members, who had been listlessly scattered, immediately converged around Yuder.

“You all must have heard earlier that the last remaining crack is buried beneath the ground.”

“…”

“Whatever we do, an earthquake is inevitable, and it’ll be far more dangerous than before. But… I’m determined to deal with it.”

“…”

“However, you don’t all need to stay with me. This is your last chance to return to the shore.”

It was a message implying that those who wished to return should speak now. It was truly their last opportunity.

The members exchanged silent glances. After a moment, one of them raised a hand. It was Steiber, his head wrapped in bandages. With a tired yet serious expression, he spoke.

“Hmm, I see. So, when do we start the operation? Let us know the plan quickly. I’m tired of waiting.”

Gurgles of laughter bubbled up from the other members. They turned over, laughing uproariously, then one by one, they raised their fists and thumped their chests, extending them forward. It was a signal indicating agreement and commitment to stand together, like multiple fists in the darkness, clustering like branches of a tree.

Their reckless and brazen attitudes seemed to defy fear itself.

Despite being exhausted to the point of death, their determined eyes revealed an unwavering resolve to not leave until their mission was completed. Yuder remained silent, observing them.

What a fiercely insane bunch they were, no matter where they belonged. And Yuder did not dislike such characters.

After surveying their faces, sparking with life only in their eyes, he spoke.

“…First, one of you go up and relay the message to the Commander. I’ll tell you what to prepare afterward.”

The members decided who would go up through rock-paper-scissors and then sent one up. Yuder thought that Kishiar might not respond to his call, but this worry was soon proved unnecessary.

“Yuder! The Commander has come up to the boat on the water! And there’s another person with him!”

Rumble. The vibrations from below grew slightly stronger than before. Simultaneously, his heart started to beat even more fiercely.

Yuder gauged the intensity of the vibrations through the water and then spoke.

“Steiber. I’ll go up for a while, so please watch over here. If anything happens, send a signal immediately.”

Everyone looked surprised at Yuder’s words. Steiber also widened his eyes, then quickly nodded with a smile.

“…Alright! Leave it to me and go!”

Finally, Yuder ascended towards the surface of his own volition. He was worried about what he left behind but did not look back.

The surrounding darkness gradually brightened, and the pressure that had been weighing down on him eased.

Swoosh. Yuder finally emerged from the water. Through the dripping water, he could see a small boat and the people standing on it.

“Yuder!”

“Yuder has come up!”

The members, startled by Yuder’s sudden emergence, were still reeling in surprise. Yuder, however, was intently observing the man standing before him, whose expression suggested he had been expecting Yuder all along.

It had been precisely one day.

Yesterday morning, just as dawn was breaking, he had plunged into the sea as the sun started to peek faintly over the horizon. Now, the same-sized sun hung over the sea, casting its light in an eerily similar manner.

The sea. The sun. And Kishiar, standing a short distance away, watching him.

Everything felt so similar that it seemed as if no time had passed at all, rather than a whole day. The time he had spent in the dark seabed felt like a dream, and only this moment seemed real - a strange sensation indeed.

But upon closer inspection, Kishiar's clothes, though clean, were tattered and fluttering, and Yuder, unlike yesterday, was soaked, with hastily applied bandages on his limbs. The unfamiliar yet familiar feeling burning inside him, like a fire lit within his chest, was something not seen the day before.

To others, Kishiar's face might appear usual, but Yuder could read the fluctuating emotions in his red eyes. These indescribable feelings strikingly mirrored what Yuder himself was experiencing.

If Mick Shuden hadn't abruptly interjected with a jovial greeting, Yuder might have continued staring at Kishiar's face, perhaps piercing through it.

"…It's been a while, Assistant Aile! Or should I now address you as Baron Aile?"

It felt like he had been facing Kishiar for an eternity, but a blink revealed it was only long enough for a single drop of water to trickle down his hair. Yuder, looking at Mick with dark circles under his eyes and a scruffy beard, shook his head.

"Yuder is sufficient."

"Alright, then. But… are you going to stay submerged in the water? It might not be too cold in the southern winter, but it's still the sea… Aren't you cold?"

"Not cold, and I have to return soon, so it's easier to stay here."

"Hmm. I thought you'd be in a terrible state after spending a day underwater, but you actually look better than before, at least to my eyes."

Mick spoke casually, mindful of the others, but Yuder understood his implication. Mick was indicating that Yuder's essence, as he saw it, had improved since their last encounter in the West.

‘I remember him saying I had a lot of holes back then.’

Just then, Kishiar stepped forward confidently and descended into the water outside the boat. The splash as he submerged startled everyone.

“Commander?”

“I thought I should get used to the water too, since the Assistant is in it. Indeed, it’s not as cold as I expected.”

The members, who had been worried about the cold, smiled faintly with relief.

And Yuder,

“…”

Felt a light touch caressing his submerged hand, causing him to pause. The touch, feeling the gloved and bandaged hand as if to confirm its state, was infinitely careful, contrasting with the smile visible above the water.

Kishiar casually intertwined the tip of Yuder’s index finger and then slipped away, before finally speaking softly.

“…Well, now it’s time to hear why you’ve come this far. What’s the situation like down there?”

Yuder took a deep breath and began to explain.

“The remaining crack on the seabed, as you know, is just one. But, it turns out, it’s partially buried underground. The tremors we’ve experienced so far seem to be due to its location,” Yuder explained.

“…”

“The number of monsters left inside the crack is significant. The exit they need to use has become smaller and is located in a more dangerous area. For now, they are unable to escape and are only causing vibrations, but it’s only a matter of time before they break free. And when they do…”

“The land beneath the sea will flip, causing earthquakes and massive tsunamis,” Kishiar interjected, reinforcing the known facts in everyone’s minds.

“Yes. That’s what will happen. That’s why I… wish to borrow the Commander’s power to minimize the damage when the monsters emerge.”

“Borrow the Commander’s power…? You mean to bring the Commander underwater?”

“Is that even possible?”

While the members expressed their doubts, Kishiar alone responded calmly.

“Do you think it’s possible with my power?”

That would depend on how much power he had left, but considering the potential he had shown while using his power so far…

Yuder paused, then slowly and confidently nodded his head.

“Based on my judgment, yes, it is possible.”

“So you believe this is the best course of action?”

Yuder detected in Kishiar’s use of the term ‘best course of action’ a reference to their previous conversation in the Western prison.

“…Yes.”

A bright smile spread across Kishiar’s weary face. He nodded with eyes that sparkled with a surprising and joyful light.

“Alright. Although I’ve never attempted this before, if this is the best course of action you’ve found, then surely there can be no better option for me either.”

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Chapter 963

“Alright. Although I’ve never attempted this before, if this is the best course of action you’ve found, then surely there can be no better option for me either.”

These words felt to Yuder like a declaration, a commitment to make the ‘best course of action’ he had found truly the best. Indeed, the expression in Kishiar’s eyes seemed to echo this sentiment.

Until now, and even more so from this point forward, predicting what lay ahead for them had become an impossible task. The remaining strategies they had were barely enough to keep them from the worst outcomes.

Yet, despite this.

Now, the countless possibilities of failure no longer felt suffocating or burdensome.

Why, one might wonder. It certainly wasn’t solely because Kishiar had said so.

For Yuder Aile, the ‘best’ had always nearly equated to solitude. Acting alone had seemed the optimal way to exert full effort.

Alone, there was no worry about others causing trouble within unseen bounds. There was no need to pay mind to any presence irrelevant to the objective. Decisions could be made quickly and easily without consultation, and should things go awry, the responsibility fell on but one head, making it somewhat easier to address.

And so, it had been a heavy burden.

He had always thought it natural for the weight of the best to be heavy. If he failed, it meant that no one else could succeed, such had been the outcome of his ‘best course of action’ until now.

But now, his shoulders felt unbelievably light. It was a sense of relief he had never experienced before.

Such a light ‘best’. Yuder stretched out, shaking off the oppressive weight that had once burdened him. Morning light, reflected in his eyes as he opened them, tinted the pupils that had always been as dark as an abyss. Before his comrades could even begin to doubt what they saw in his unfamiliarly bright eyes and softly curved lips, Yuder turned and spoke.

“To reach the site of the crack, we have a long journey ahead. Let’s go.”

Splash. The shadows of three figures, tinged with a faint blue hue, began to sink deeper and deeper into the ocean. Yuder exerted the protective power of water to its limits to cover not only him but also Kishiar and Mick.

The members remaining on the surface were astounded to see Yuder use his protective abilities, which were already strenuous to employ for oneself, for the three of them. However, this was not solely Yuder’s power.

Yuder’s lack of hesitation in inviting Kishiar to the undersea journey was due to the nature of his power’s use. Previously, during the hailstorm, he had interfered with Gakane’s shadow curtain, ‘pulling’ it to inflate its size massively.

Thus, it stood to reason that the ‘water’s protection’, which manifested power in a specific form over the body, similar to the shadow curtain in essence, could also be stretched and applied more easily to others.

Upon hearing Yuder’s words, Kishiar pondered for a moment before responding that it was indeed possible. And now, he was proving that his answer was far from an empty promise.

‘The strain of exerting power on three people is far less than one would expect. Truly remarkable…’

Even for Yuder, if he had to protect the three of them in the deep sea using only his power without Kishiar’s cooperation, any other activity would have

been impossible. In a situation heading towards an unknown danger, it would have been worse than not acting at all.

As the surroundings gradually darkened and the light faded, the oppressive pressure intensified with each passing moment. Yuder was accustomed to this pressure, having been in these depths before, while Kishiar, true to his title as a swordmaster, endured it calmly. Mick, however, was different. As an untrained civilian, the deeper he descended, the more his complexion paled under the increasing pain, despite the protective powers.

Yet, seeing Mick grit his teeth and bear the pain without much complaint, it was clear that he was not someone who had lived an easy life, contrary to his seemingly feeble appearance. Like before in the West, and now, he had promptly abandoned all his tasks and rushed alone at the call of Kishiar. His willingness to follow into the madness of an undersea journey, without a word of protest, made it hard to believe he was a mere civilian without any powers apart from those of an Awakener.

Mick Shuden’s loyalty to Kishiar was undeniably genuine.

Rumble…

The eerie, faint vibration skimming the skin was a sign they were nearing the sea floor. Yuder spotted several dimly twinkling lights not far away - members wearing glowing bracelets approached them.

“Commander!”

“My goodness! You brought someone else!”

Amidst the members’ incredulous stares at Kishiar and Mick, Steiber appeared. Despite the unexpected situation, he, as the Deputy Commander, managed to maintain a relatively calm demeanor and greeted Kishiar.

“Commander, it’s a relief to see you in good health.”

“Likewise.”

“But who is the person with you…?”

“Just someone helping out for a while. He’ll be leaving soon.”

Kishiar kept his explanation of Mick Shuden’s identity brief, given the complicated circumstances. Steiber and the other members nodded and concluded their greetings with a brief eye contact with Mick. Yuder, after a moment of silence, broke the stillness of the water and spoke.

“Steiber, how have things been since I left?”

“There have been four minor tremors since you left, Yuder. And then it’s been quiet until now.”

Four times. The time spent above wasn’t long, but it seemed too few to be just four tremors.

There was only one implication.

The intervals of tremors emanating from the crack hadn’t shortened; on the contrary, they had significantly increased. Yuder’s expression grew serious.

There is a moment of temporary calm before a great disaster strikes. One must never mistake it for peace. It’s merely a step back before a major upheaval.

“Has there ever been such a lull before?”

“We’ve never experienced a sudden halt in tremors like this. It doesn’t bode well.”

Responding honestly to Kishiar’s question, he then turned to Mick, gripping his shoulder.

“Mick. Do you see anything?”

“…”

“Mick?”

Mick, who had been silent during their descent, finally responded to the call. Yuder saw a flickering transparent energy in his eyes. If it was this visible, it meant Mick was currently using a tremendous amount of power.

Since when had he been exerting his abilities to this extent? As this thought crossed his mind, Mick's pale lips slowly parted.

"…Danger."

"What?"

"Move!"

Before the questioning faces of the Cavalry members could clear their confusion, Yuder reflexively used his power to push everyone swiftly in all directions.

Simultaneously, a crushing pressure enveloped them, and the entire sea pulsated violently up and down.

Rooooar…!

"…!"

If someone were to haphazardly flip and then violently spin the world as if it were a cup, perhaps this is the shock that would ensue.

Everything was upheaved, turning stomachs inside out. The Cavalry members, mouths agape in agony, involuntarily released bubbles of air as their eyes rolled back in pain. Yuder, trying to protect them, unleashed the power of water, but combating the frenzied, shaking impacts was akin to trying to calm down a herd of crazy cattle with bare hands. It was an even more challenging task while safeguarding three people.

"Guh…!"

As Yuder gritted his teeth, swallowing the rising blood, an arm stretched out from the darkness, grasping his waist and pulling him into an embrace.

Kishiar, holding Yuder, released an invisible force all at once.

Whoosh…!

The power emanating from him rippled like water in a violently shaken bucket, sweeping away the external shocks that had been engulfing them.

With the directionless impacts now pushed away, calm returned to their surroundings, and astonishingly, everything began to regain stability. Since the force originated from Kishiar, Yuder, in his embrace, was the first to stabilize.

"…Thank you."

Regaining his composure, Yuder firmly intertwined the protective power, swiftly reasserting his command over all water within his reach.

Suppress!

Responding to his command, the water reluctantly began to calm down. Yuder seized this opportunity to draw the members, who had been wildly swept away by the currents, and Mick, closer to them.

"We were close to losing someone for real…"

Only then did Kishiar withdraw his power and release Yuder. Everyone struggled to regain their senses from the intense shock, but fortunately, thanks to each exerting their abilities desperately, no one was seriously injured.

Mick, the last to come to, gasped for air but managed to mouth his words audibly.

"…It's going to emerge soon."

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Chapter 964

“…It’s going to emerge soon.”

“Are you speaking of the monster?”

Inquired Yuder and Kishiar, their gazes locking in mutual concern. At the moment they were about to issue instructions to their members for the tentacle response, Mick opened his mouth wide, waving his hands with a pale face.

“No. Below! It will come out from below. Not from above!”

“…Below?”

He thought he had misread the lip shape, but that wasn’t the case. Mick had definitely whispered “below.”

Does that mean, as Yuder had previously guessed, instead of the monster aiming to emerge upward toward the sea, causing shock by hitting the submerged part, it intends to dig through the seabed below where the current crack is buried? Up until now, it had always tried to come out upward toward the sea, so it was naturally thought that it would do so again this time. If the creature was trying to burrow out from underneath the seabed from the start, then the tremendous shock just now was instantly understandable.

“It won’t come out from above. Below. Down below…! From that hole…! You must avoid it now…!”

Mick’s mumbling became more and more disorganized, and his pace quickened. He might think he was conveying his intentions as slowly as possible, but even Yuder, blessed with insight, found it difficult to grasp all of his words. To calm Mick down, who was moving his mouth as if enchanted, looking pale as if he might faint at any moment, Yuder gently exerted power around him.

With a whoosh!

“Ah!”

Mick was startled, his panic momentarily arrested as water enveloped him, the best means of regaining composure underwater. The unexpected rush of water stopped him mid-sentence.

“Please, calm yourself,” Yuder urged, sensing that his excessive use of power was exacerbating Mick’s agitation. He covered Mick’s eyes with his hand, the sudden darkness causing Mick to flinch, then slowly, he began to settle.

Kanna, another with the ability to read information, had once fainted while attempting to exert her power on the Red Stone. Delving into or reading dangerous things was perilously difficult, threatening even the life of the Awakeners wielding their abilities.

Fortunately, Mick did not lose consciousness like Kanna. Covering his eyes allowed him time to compose himself, his body trembling less with each passing moment.

As Mick calmed down, Kishiar approached, gently pushing Yuder’s hand away to take his place.

“Mick.”

“…”

No response.

“Focus on me.”

Kishiar skillfully positioned himself to prevent Mick from looking downward. When Mick finally opened his eyes, they were frighteningly bloodshot, to the point where Yuder worried that any further exertion of power might cause them to burst. Mick gazed at Kishiar, managing a strained, almost smile-like expression after a moment.

“I have shown an unsightly side of myself. My apologies,” he said, his voice tinged with regret.

“Did you clearly see which direction the monster inside the crack is trying to emerge from?” asked Yuder.

“Yes, that much is certain.”

“And what else? What did you see?”

“It’s difficult to explain,” Mick said, shaking his head, his bloodshot eyes a testament to his ordeal. “Initially, I tried to take a closer look at the abnormal crack. But it seems beyond my ability to see clearly…”

Mick, it seemed, had instinctively decided that using his power to closely examine the phenomenon was far too perilous. Instead, he concentrated his abilities on observing the movements of the monster as it struggled to escape from within. This distinction, fortunately, was within his capabilities, yet even that brief glimpse had harmed his eyes.

As he spoke, blinking several times, blood began to seep from the corner of one eye, like a mist of red. Covering his bleeding eye with his hand, Mick’s pale lips moved as he murmured,

“To me, below… it all appeared as a massive, gaping hole. But it was constantly moving… as if it were alive…”

A hole. Mick had mentioned a hole before. It seemed it was not a mere metaphor for the strange crack. Yuder, wedging himself next to Kishiar, inquired,

“You had mentioned me having holes as well. Do you remember? Is that what you are referring to?”

Mick hesitated, as if to shake his head, but then slowly nodded.

“I am not sure, but… it seems somewhat like that… in the sense that it’s like a wound… perhaps similar.”

A wound. Yuder made a mental note of this newly emerged term.

“It seems we should not allow him to look below any further.”

Kishiar, after assessing Mick’s condition, said this to Yuder, who agreed with his assessment.

Ideally, they should have sent Mick back to the surface immediately, but there was no time for that with the monster about to emerge. Being separated from Yuder, the one capable of protective power, would be more dangerous for Mick in his current state.

“Mick. Do not use your power anymore.”

With a brief and decisive command, Kishiar signaled to a member of their team to take over Mick’s care. This team member was exceptionally talented in creating protective barriers of water and had sustained the least injuries during the ongoing underwater battle. It seemed prudent to entrust Mick to him. Exhausted as if all his energy had been drained merely from making his report, Mick listlessly followed the team member.

Simultaneously, a second shockwave reverberated.

-Kooouuuum—!

The sensation was like being in a giant’s cup, violently shaken. The tremendous jolt felt like it could churn their insides, yet their response to this second impact was much swifter than before. Kishiar exerted his pushing force while Yuder quickly matched his timing, exerting his power. The current Yuder summoned smoothly intertwined with Kishiar’s force, forming a large, wall-like barrier that solidly protected the nearby members.

-Whoaaaak!

Within the safety of their combined power, hardly any shock could penetrate.

However, they couldn’t focus solely on defense. They needed to deal with the monster trying to breach the seabed below.

The fact that the monster was not emerging through the crack upward, but instead heading in the opposite direction, was disconcerting. Nevertheless, there was only one course of action.

‘We need to go as deep as possible, dig through the seabed, and create conditions for Kishiar’s power to be effective.’

As Yuder looked at Kishiar, the man’s gaze met his squarely, even in the darkness. His eyes conveyed readiness, unstartled and prepared for whatever Yuder would initiate.

Yuder nodded slightly and then signaled to the members.

“The Commander and I are going down. When the monster ascends, the remaining members will unite their strength to create a current and send it to the surface.”

In the depths beyond, there existed only entities perilously close to death.

A moment of inattention there was enough to crush a body with its immense pressure.

Water, utterly dangerous for humans accustomed to breathing on land.

And there, gaping open, lay the crack with its lurking monster.

Yet, knowing all this, the members did not express concern over Yuder’s command. Nor did they voice any lack of confidence in their ability to create currents and send the monster to the surface without Yuder. They simply exchanged the same signal with Yuder and Kishiar.

“Understood.”

“Got it.”

Yuder responded with the same gesture. Then, following him, Kishiar moved his hand in a final signal.

A salute that stretched from the chest-where the emblem of the Cavalry was located-outward.

It was a form of salute peculiar to the Cavalry Unit, used when the Commander had no specific tasks to assign.

A wave of emotion lit up the faces of the team members, so dull in the dim light. Had they been above water, they might have burst into laughter or shouted joyously.

Leaving them behind, Yuder and Kishiar swiftly descended further down.

The thick darkness quickly engulfed the presence of the team members, leaving a chilling cold to pervade the surroundings. As Yuder turned to check Kishiar's location, a hand reached out and gently clasped his, as if to say, 'I am here, no need to look back.'

Yuder gripped the hand firmly in response.

In the deepest realms of the sea, where no human had ever set foot, a place filled with the unknown revealed itself.

There, the crack stood out strikingly, even in the pitch-black darkness.

Confronting the eeriness that instinctively repelled him, Yuder summoned all his remaining strength in a swift motion.

There was no need for preparation.

From his golden eyes, a light so bright it almost flickered burst forth. This time, not the water, but the earth itself responded to his command.

-Kuruururururu…!

Quietly, yet overwhelmingly fast, as not to trigger an earthquake.

An intangible force exploded from Yuder's body, enveloping the area around the crack.

The seabed, untouched by humans since the world's creation, silently screamed as it began to crumble softly.

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Chapter 965

The seabed, untouched by humans since the world's creation, silently screamed as it began to crumble softly.

Rumble…

A pitch-black hole, which had been concealing itself, revealed its presence. Pale dust rose heavily like fog, and the pressure of the water that pressed down on the body intensified.

The horrific entities lurking within the cracks began to stir. In the land that was collapsing, or already fallen, the creatures beyond the crack thrashed and wailed desperately, trying to escape.

The movement that would have originally torn through the solid seafloor and caused a shock had been quickly mitigated by Yuder's power. Although the seabed did receive the impact, it wasn't significant enough to propagate far and cause an earthquake. As the monsters writhed to escape through the cracks, Yuder's power only accelerated the crumbling of the seabed.

Yet, not all the surrounding land had crumbled. Apart from the sections collapsed by Yuder's power, massive rocks, which had long supported the sea floor like pillars, lurked everywhere like reefs. Whenever some of the monsters collided with them, massive shocks trembled the entire ocean, screaming.

Every hair on Yuder's body stood on end, feeling as if the whole world was on the brink of tearing apart.

Amidst this, Yuder did not blink an eye, focusing his entire being, continuously drawing out his remaining strength.

As he exerted himself to the limit, his body trembled instinctively, showing a near-painful reaction, but Yuder's mind remained clear and quiet.

It was strange. Despite his intense concentration, he felt as if his consciousness was split in two, able to cherish the moments spent alone with Kishiar as if they were eternal, even finding joy in it.

He was not afraid of anything, nor was he worried about anything.

Yuder, like one who had forgotten everything, relentlessly drew more strength. The power surrounding his body flared visibly, even in the darkness, causing turmoil. Even the rocks of the seabed, which seemed unshakeable, finally gave in and crumbled away bit by bit.

The creatures within the crack thrashed, entangled with the collapsing land. Some, trying desperately to escape, were crushed under the weight of the land, while others, like pieces of a larger monster, continuously filled the gaps.

It was a scene reminiscent of a power struggle on a board, albeit on a much larger scale.

Each time the monsters, writhing to escape from within and around the crack, came into contact, Yuder's power met equal resistance. The sensations that assaulted him were ferocious, as if tearing his flesh apart, yet Yuder did not stop. No sensation felt greater than the subtle stimulation of Kishiar's fingers entwined firmly with his in the darkness.

"…"

As if sensing his thoughts, the grip on his hand grew stronger.

Yuder, in response, gripped the entwined hand tightly and gently closed his eyes.

And finally.

Roar, rumble…!

Yuder's power successfully pierced through the monsters and the crack, seizing control over the entire sea bed that had concealed them. The land, crumbling and scattering as if bowing down to the mere human force

pressing upon it, finally began to form a vast hole, large enough to contain an entire city, both ferociously and gently.

If someone could have observed this tremendous spectacle from outside, as if looking down upon a small stage, they would have likened it to the sight of the land around a small hole in the sand being swiftly sucked in and sinking.

The last crack buried in the ground was exposed, presenting a perilous moment where it seemed everything inside would spill out.

Yet, it was also a moment of opportunity, with the highest chance that the entire sea bed wouldn’t be completely overturned, even while pulling in the enemy.

Yuder thought quietly to himself.

‘Now.’

At that precise moment, Kishiar’s power was unleashed.

Though no signal was exchanged, the power exerted exactly when Yuder wished, smoothly and swiftly brushed past them, heading straight for the crack to reach the portions that had emerged.

‘—!’

The chunks of monsters that Yuder’s power could never properly touch or pull out resounded with a roar-like vibration.

The entities, previously entangled in disorder, lacking any definite form, and emerging from the crack, suddenly ceased their movements as if caught by an invisible colossal hand.

Only Kishiar could understand and wield Yuder’s will in this world, his power.

Yuder hoped that Kishiar’s power would meaningfully affect the monsters, as he had intended.

Shortly after.

Roaaaaar!

From below, the flow of water surged, indicating the outcome had begun to manifest.

Yuder instinctively knew that Kishiar's power had effectively reached the monster chunks.

Using the pushing and pulling force to make the masses of monsters buried in the sea floor's crack come out completely downwards before causing an earthquake, taking advantage of the gaps beyond the hole created by Yuder to turn in a direction other than the sea floor.

Of course, Kishiar's power was not absolute enough to bind and move the entire massive mass of monsters trying to escape from the crack in one go. Even if his power had been completely unspent until now, it was a task so difficult that its success could not be guaranteed.

However, once anything in the sea submerged, it became difficult to go completely against the natural flow of the vast nature.

Yuder believed that If Kishiar's power could properly exert itself along such flow, there was a sufficient possibility of succeeding in this seemingly impossible task without using tremendous power. It was a chance that might be difficult even for others to attempt, but possible for Kishiar.

And Kishiar, living up to such expectations, used his power at the perfect moment, not only going with but fully riding and utilizing the direction of the massive flow of water caused by the collapsing land and the events unfolding due to Yuder's actions.

Swooosh!

The mass of monsters, half emerging in the form of tentacles and stretching long towards the enemy, was caught off guard and swayed heavily as it was caught by the 'pulling' force combined with the flow of water.

Even a very small pebble, if tripped over properly, can cause a giant enemy to fall and break its nose. The maneuver Kishiar placed had exactly that effect.

In the blink of an eye, the flow surrounding the crack changed. The terrible things that had been thrashing against nature without restraint could not withstand the pulling force and began to shake, wobble, and then tangle wildly.

Thus, in an instant, the monster chunk seemed no longer to be escaping the crack of its own accord, but rather appeared as if being forcibly dragged out by someone’s hand.

This process did not hinder Yuder’s power, which was simultaneously continuing to collapse the land and trying to free it from the influence of the monsters. It shook the monsters with a miraculous strength, seamlessly blending with Yuder’s double-edged task.

The sea, filled with foreign matter due to the aftermath of the collapsed land, was like a dangerous terrain where one could not see even an inch ahead. Enemies filled all directions, and among them, the most dangerous ones were unpredictable in where they might strike from. Continuing to exert force in such an environment, without any armor for protection, was akin to a madman risking his life.

Yet, neither Yuder nor Kishiar sought to retreat from this peril.

The two disparate powers merged, struggling to achieve their goal, and at times, striving to protect each other’s vulnerabilities.

Even as the turbulent currents threatened to sweep them away, causing shocks that felt as if their bodies would fly off and wounds were inflicted, their strength never ceased, desperately fulfilling their duties.

In the midst of this chaotic situation, so disorienting that it was hard to ascertain what was happening or whether they were successfully extracting the monsters from the crack without further significant damage, Yuder kept

his eyes closed, focusing on just one repeating thought. It wasn’t anything grand.

He did not want to lose the grip on this hand he was holding.

That was all he thought about, not allowing anything else to occupy his mind…

Finally, the reverberation of the seabed ceased.

The Cavalry members, who had been using all their strength to protect themselves, could now cautiously catch their breath and relax their exhausted bodies.

Just trying not to be swept away by the tremendous flow from below had been so draining, it felt almost lethal. Steiber bit his lip, looking down at the dark abyss below without even glancing at his own body, which was bleeding from newly acquired wounds.

‘…I don’t even have the energy to wonder or be surprised about what’s happening anymore. Are Yuder and the Commander alright?’

Despite knowing how exceptional they were, the magnitude of the vibrations had been so great, he couldn’t help but worry. Yuder had said that if his plan succeeded, the monsters would come up this way. Had it worked?

If not, monsters would soon emerge from the crack buried in the ground, causing a massive undersea earthquake, and they would have to prepare for death.

‘I’m prepared for that, but…’

He inevitably thought about the family he had left behind.

‘I told them when I wrote my will before coming here, even if I die, don’t mourn too much, but be proud.’

Surviving by going to the surface now might extend his life for a moment, but it would never be a proud path for his wife and children, nor for himself. That's also why he never backed down, despite having many opportunities to escape.

It was at this moment, as Steiber painfully opened his eyes, that he caught a glimpse of the man who had come with their Commander, moving his lips as if to speak and pointing downwards. Following his gesture, Steiber's gaze dropped just as an unmistakable massive flow and vibration rose again from below.

'___!'

Within it, a long, serpent-like chunk of monsters was also rising towards them.

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Chapter 966

Steiber’s mind grew faint.

“Success…? Or failure…?”

Honestly, anyone with a brain would have realized that Yuder’s plan was more likely to fail than to succeed. In the deep sea, where the only concern was not getting crushed, the idea of descending even deeper to the very bottom to uncover the hidden anomalous crack and deal with the lurking monsters was daunting.

A normal human would not dare to venture to the seabed without bracing for death, let alone speak of it so decisively without hesitation.

Of course, Yuder was no ordinary human. He possessed abilities, physical strength, and mental fortitude far surpassing anyone in the Cavalry. Tasks deemed impossible were always resolved when he took charge.

And then there was the Commander, Kishiar. His extraordinary capabilities were in no way inferior to Yuder’s. The members of the Cavalry still did not fully grasp the extent of their Commander’s capabilities. To the world, Duke Peletta was a foolish idler, but to them, their Commander was anything but. Yet Kishiar often brazenly behaved in ways that seemed to confirm people’s prejudices. The frightening part was that, despite being so close and having spent considerable time together, they still couldn’t fathom who he truly was.

Keeping secrets and thoroughly deceiving others was no easy feat. If someone had managed to do so thus far, what couldn’t he achieve in the future?

Steiber felt a strange belief that these two, being together, might turn the tide even in this seemingly impossible situation.

But the ominous vibrations rising now, and the outline of the serpent-like monster drawing closer and closer…!

Rrrrrrrrrrr!

Steiber closed his eyes tightly, then opened them. His fleeting yet profound thoughts vanished. He was deeply concerned for the safety of the two who had descended below, but this was no time for idle worries.

Their task was straightforward.

Yuder had instructed, “When the monster ascends, the remaining members will unite their strength to create a current and send it to the surface.” Even if they couldn’t avoid the undersea earthquake, the visible form of the monster in the distance meant it was time for Steiber to act.

If asked whether he could fully protect himself with his remaining strength, he honestly wasn’t confident.

Even a momentary lapse in the protective force would result in a horrific death, unrecognizable amidst the currents and pressure. Alternatively, he could be attacked by the ascending monster and become its prey. Either way, death seemed closer than life.

However, Steiber did not turn his back or despair in fear. He remembered Yuder Aile’s demeanor from the day before. He also recalled the image of the Commander, the first to step forward and slash towards the sea.

Without hesitation, he gathered strength in his hand and signaled his nearby comrades.

“We respond!”

Even if their combined force was no more than a pebble swallowed by a giant wave, not acting would bring greater disaster to their comrades above. Therefore, even without Yuder’s command, they would never retreat.

Steiber mustered all his remaining strength and began to create a current. Having learned by watching Yuder, the current he now conjured was no

longer as daunting and overwhelming as it had been at first. It was just excruciatingly painful and exhausting due to the excessive exertion of power.

As he strained every muscle to generate the current, Steiber looked around and realized that his comrades, too, were already taking similar actions in the darkness, making signaling unnecessary.

All except one member, who, tasked with escorting the Commander's guest, was unable to use any other power and swiftly moved upwards. The collective effort soon created several small whirlpools, weaving together to form a new current in the water. Naturally, this current was much weaker and smaller than the one created with Yuder. Yet, the members remained calm and focused, ready to unleash their power at a moment's notice.

Once everyone was prepared, Steiber sent the signal without hesitation.

"Now!"

Steiber witnessed an ominous current sweeping up along with the massive shadow of a monster ascending through it and launched the current he had created toward it. Simultaneously, the currents created by other members were also shot forward.

Although each current was small on its own, they had learned from Yuder that combined, they could become a much greater force. Despite appearing feeble compared to their previous efforts, the currents created by the members did not scatter but instead converged, advancing toward the monster.

Against the imposing shadow rising, their efforts seemed minuscule, leaving no one certain if they could actually push the monster to the surface. Clenching his teeth, Steiber intensely watched, not missing a single moment as the currents raced toward the monster's shadow.

And then.

Kwaaaaaa… Ahhh….

Just when Steiber thought the currents were about to reach the monster, which seemed poised to extend its tentacle-like limb towards them, he suddenly realized that the monster was almost motionless.

‘What’s going on?’

As soon as he noticed this, the combined currents launched by Steiber and his comrades struck the monster.

Their best effort, now at its limit and barely making an impact, was like a small wave, seemingly about to disappear as soon as it hit, like a pebble swallowed by the tide.

But then, something unexpected happened.

Pufffff….

What they had thought was a giant snake-like creature turned out to be a misconception. The monster burst like a bubble.

‘What…!’

Thousands of tiny, insignificant fragments that had formed the monster’s body dispersed across the sea like white mist. The tremendous wave mixed with the current hit Steiber and passed by. However, it wasn’t as threatening as he had braced for in the face of expected death.

As Steiber instinctively braced for defense and shut his eyes tightly, upon opening them, he saw the familiar force of someone else overlapping around his body.

A force of water, firm like a transparent wall yet delicately spread out. This solid protective power had originated from somewhere deep below, amidst the remnants of the monster. Steiber thought he glimpsed a faint golden light in that darkness. In this darkness, where it was hard to see ahead, only one person could accurately identify their location and exert such power. A moment of deep joy and realization thrilled him.

A sudden surge of deep joy and realization sent a thrill through him.

“Yuder!”

From the depths of the sea, two small shadows ascended at an unbelievably fast speed, piercing through the remnants of the monster like an arrow. Emerging into view were none other than Yuder Aile and Kishiar La Orr.

Even in the dim light, their condition looked disheveled, but they appeared unharmed and alive.

‘They’re alive!’

Yuder, with a light shining from one eye stronger than any magic stone bracelet, raised his hand.

The gesture of his uplifted fingers and their trembling signified something simple.

Earthquake.

Simultaneously, Kishiar also made a hand signal.

Move upwards.

The moment he signaled, everything around seemed to swell, and the remnants of the monster in the sea rushed toward them like a torrent. The currents created by the members dwindled in strength. However, Steiber no longer felt death drawing near.

Even though he couldn’t fully grasp what was happening, wasn’t it enough that the two had completed their task and returned to them? He laughed heartily, asking no questions, and exerted his power. The force of water he shot beneath him started to propel his body explosively upwards.

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Chapter 967

Previously, at the very bottom of the sea, Yuder, moving through the water with Kishiar, thought,

‘We’ve done everything we can at the bottom of the sea.’

It felt like an eternity since he had forgotten everything in the deepest part of the sea, focusing solely on exerting his strength. Yuder instinctively felt that the external force trying to break through his power and burrow deeper into the seabed was gone.

This meant that Yuder had successfully protected the land, and the monsters, pulled by Kishiar’s power, had all escaped in a direction other than the seabed.

The outcome was, indeed, more successful than anticipated.

However, this was obviously not the end. The monsters that had emerged were bound to rise following the water’s current, so it was necessary to prepare for the aftermath of the last crack facing imminent destruction. Naturally, this aftermath was an earthquake.

The last crack was half-buried beneath the seabed. Although Yuder had prevented the monsters lurking within from burrowing deeper, the moment the crack vanished, the very spot would empty, causing the rocks of the land he had previously collapsed to shift positions once again.

Even with Kishiar’s support and having exerted their strength to the fullest, it took so much time to do what they had managed up to this point. Building is difficult, but collapsing happens in an instant; with the remaining strength, it was impossible to block them all at once. Pouring the little energy left into this would be disproportionately challenging and would also mean dragging Kishiar into danger.

Therefore, avoiding the earthquake completely was impossible. This had been anticipated and communicated to the members even before arriving here.

Originally, he hadn't expected such a favorable outcome. He had braced for minor earthquakes or unforeseen incidents during the process of drawing out the monsters, thinking that even if they managed to achieve their goal, they would have to stay underwater for quite some time to respond. But now, they had successfully pulled out the monsters without causing an underwater earthquake, and the crack's disappearance was not immediate. There was a brief window just before the aftermath struck.

This meant… it was possible to consider a secondary plan.

The underwater earthquake resulting from the crack's disappearance would be significantly weaker than the one that would have been caused by the monsters. With time on their hands, perhaps they could regroup with nearby members, quickly retreat to the water's surface, and confront the aftermath and the remaining monsters there. If successful, they could ensure the safety of the members, which, in their current exhausted state, would be the safest possible outcome.

But what if, contrary to Yuder's judgment, the earthquake resulting from the crack's disappearance was not weaker than the one caused by the monsters?

What if something had already happened to the members in Steiber's direction before they regrouped?

What if joining the other members on the surface, though seemingly simple, ended up causing more confusion?

If Yuder were alone, it would be best to continue holding his ground as before. But wouldn't it be right to send Kishiar straight up?

The better-than-expected outcome of the plan made the decision for the next move even more difficult. Even Yuder, who usually made quick decisions, found it hard to determine which option was better in this situation. The thought that a moment's choice could lead to the loss of

countless lives, just like in a previous life, would have made it difficult for anyone.

In that brief yet intense moment of contemplation, it was Kishiar La Orr who brought it to a close, naturally.

He tugged at Yuder’s hand, which he had been holding tightly all this time. When Yuder turned his head, Kishiar reached out with his free hand to caress Yuder’s cheek, and then the area beneath his brightly shining golden eyes.

In the cold, dark water, that slow touch felt as if a burning flame had reached him. Yet, it wasn’t painfully scorching. Rather, it felt pleasantly warm and comforting, like basking beside a stove in winter.

The man parted his lips and conveyed a short message, audible enough for Yuder to understand.

“Actually, at the last moment, I changed the direction of the force.”

He changed the direction of the force at the last moment?

“What does that mean…”

Yuder couldn’t grasp the cryptic meaning of those words for a moment, but then his eyes widened in realization.

While Yuder had been manipulating the seabed, Kishiar had been pulling the monsters emerging from the crack, preventing them from burrowing under the seabed. Changing that at the last moment could have meant pushing them in the opposite direction, but pushing didn’t necessarily imply only one direction.

Yuder recalled the battle report from the members.

The man who had shattered the massive cluster of monsters into pieces, allowing others to only deal with smaller ones - a miraculous feat. Although he didn’t know the specifics, it must have involved cutting the surface of

the monsters and then ‘pushing’ to sever the connections between the smaller creatures that made up the larger monster’s body.

But what if he had successfully repeated the same feat just now?

The monsters struggling to escape from the crack were not yet strongly connected. Since all of this occurred amidst the underwater collapse caused by Yuder, Kishiar’s power could have briefly penetrated the weak bonds.

If he had managed to loosen the connections between the monsters by changing the direction of the force…!

Then, the last massive monster that had escaped would not be able to move as swiftly or create giant currents like the previous ones. If luck was on their side, a few attacks might be enough to shatter it into small pieces in the water. Smaller monsters were not necessarily easier to handle, but it was crucial that they couldn’t do what the larger, combined creature could.

With that in mind, the second plan he had been pondering until just now seemed quite, no, extremely viable.

Caught in these frantic thoughts, Yuder gazed at the man who had accomplished this incredible feat and laughed silently to himself.

“…Then, ascending seems to be the better choice.”

“Shall we?”

The hesitation over whether to do it or not became irrelevant. Yuder finally admitted to himself that he had actually preferred the second option all along.

Rumbling. Vibrations began to emanate from the giant hole in the seabed created by Yuder. It seemed that the crack, now devoid of anything more to escape, was finally starting to vanish.

Kishiar wrapped his arms around Yuder’s waist. Had Yuder used only his remaining strength, their ascent would not have been very fast. But the

moment Kishiar’s power subtly merged with his, the current’s direction swiftly changed, propelling them upwards without hesitation.

And then, it was now.

From the distant seabed, the vibrations from the collapsing land filling the vanished crack’s place shook the water. The tremors spread, moving the entire sea, starting to sweep up the scattered remnants of the monsters, bringing them to the surface.

Yuder, feeling the sequence of events more vividly than anyone, focused solely on pushing everyone upwards without looking back. His strength was already nearing its end, but the current he had created to lead them all above the water continued to fulfill its role without weakening or ceasing. This was partly because Kishiar was exerting his force to push them, and also because the other members nearby were continuously adding their strength, albeit small, to the flow Yuder had strained to create.

In an instant, their altitude increased, and amidst the rapidly changing pressure, a power emitting a bright white light enveloped them for protection. The once pitch-black water turned blue, then light, and finally bright, swelling into a massive wave that surged upwards, enveloping them.

Whoosh!

As the wave crashed against their skin and they emerged from under the sea, they reached the location of their comrades above the water.

“Haaah! Cough, cough!”

“Commander!”

“Yuder!”

The other members, who had barely managed to stabilize their nearly capsized boat, reached out in unison to rescue them. Steiber and his team members, floating on the water as if they had collapsed, were spitting out water and gasping for breath.

Yuder, having glanced at the high sun, reflexively turned his head away. Similarly, the man, thoroughly drenched, lifted his head above the water, droplets falling from his golden hair, and smiled with a pale face.

Skin covered with thin scars. Clothes so ruined it was hard to believe he was of noble blood.

Yet, he was still alive and well enough to smile.

Alive, they had returned together to the surface.

“What has happened below the water…?”

At that moment, the waves stirred unusually. Kishiar’s expression changed. The man, still submerged in water, pointed deep below the sea and opened his mouth.

“Soon, a wave carrying monsters will hit this place. But this will be the last of them. Is everyone ready?”

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Chapter 968

“Soon, a wave carrying monsters will hit this place. But this will be the last of them. Is everyone ready?”

No matter how dire or urgent the situation, Kishiar La Orr’s voice always maintained an eerie calmness and composure. Listening to him, one could feel as though no challenge was too great to overcome.

The members, who had suffered immensely in their previous confrontations with monsters and waves, drew strength not from the dread of another impending challenge, but from the assurance that this would be the final ordeal.

The greatest difficulty for them had been enduring the uncertainty of when it would all end. The ambiguity of when the next battle would begin prevented them from using their remaining strength fully, and even during rest, they could not fully relax. Yet, they couldn’t afford to be complacent in the face of dangerous battles, making it a grueling ordeal even for those who had triumphed over countless strenuous trainings.

However, Kishiar had now declared this to be the genuine final confrontation. Their Commander had never been deceitful about such matters.

With this proclamation, they could now expend all their remaining strength. There was no longer any need to conserve energy or endure in agony. Despite their overwhelming fatigue, the members cheered fervently, their eyes shining with determination.

“Of course!”

“We are always ready!”

In a situation where they faced their greatest challenge, the atmosphere erupted with an unbelievably bright and cheerful spirit. Yuder quietly

observed the face of the man who bore everyone’s expectations amidst this buoyant cheering.

The moment he heard those words, he was struck with the realization that the time of relying solely on clasped hands in the quiet, heavy darkness had come to an end.

Even drenched and disheveled, Kishiar shone more vividly than ever. Despite the lives of countless individuals and the fate of the entire southern region resting on his decisions, his shoulders appeared unburdened by the weight.

This wasn’t because Kishiar was a man unacquainted with failure. Rather, it was because he understood better than anyone the need for such a leader at this moment.

Whether the upcoming final wave would move as anticipated was uncertain, even to Yuder. Kishiar was aware of this as well. But they both knew that if there was something reliable to lean on, people wouldn’t easily crumble, even if unforeseen difficulties arose.

The tallest tree sees the sun first in the forest. To become a leader like a large tree that provides shade for others, Kishiar stepped forward to be the first to see the bright light. Even while clearly seeing the darkness behind him, he never showed the pain and worry those sights brought him.

The situation was reminiscent of the day of hail, but something had changed. What could this be called? Yuder pondered the word ‘change’, then replaced it with ‘growth’, feeling a bit unfamiliar with the term.

Kishiar turned to look at Yuder. He raised his hand and gently brushed Yuder’s cheek. Red blood smeared on his wet thumb, making a mark. It wasn’t painful, but it made Yuder acutely aware that his own body was covered in thin cuts, just like Kishiar’s. Yuder quietly opened his mouth, looking at the man whose eyebrows had slightly relaxed, something hard to notice for others.

“I will remain here. Commander, take the injured aboard the ship and the priest, and hasten back to the shore.”

Their time of joining forces had come to an end. To confront the imminent final wave, they needed to disperse once again.

“Is that truly the best course of action?”

“Yes.”

Kishiar, scanning the faces of the members still floating in the water and those aboard the small boat, inquired, “Will those remaining here be sufficient?”

“It may not be enough, but… we can manage to divide and weaken the force to a certain extent.”

Until now, Yuder had been unable to precisely control which direction the monster-laden waves they had created would flow. While most had been directed towards the region near Charloin where Kishiar was, sometimes they drifted into other areas. The Imperial Army, positioned in vulnerable terrains, and the dispersed Cavalry members had played their roles well, enabling them to hold on until now. But the last wave approaching was not a result of the currents they had created.

What they were about to face was the unpredictable force of ‘water’ itself. Those who wielded the power of water were strongest while in it. Yuder, among the most adept at harnessing the power of water, intended to lead and protect them, striving to tackle the wave and monsters in advance. This seemed to be the best collaborative strategy under the circumstances.

Yuder, his eyes filled with concern, responded firmly while gazing directly at the Commander.

“I’ll send the final wave to you, Commander. You must receive it as well as you have before.”

Kishiar’s eyes widened slightly before he exhaled and smiled.

“…I’m looking forward to it.”

Soon after, he departed with Mick Shuden and a few injured members lying on the ship, along with a priest overwhelmed with emotion at the thought of finally leaving this place. The boat, significantly slower than the members running on water, seemed to speed up at Kishiar’s gesture, creating bubbles as it moved towards the shore.

Yuder watched them until they were out of sight, then turned away.

Now, only a few remained here. The Cavalry members, capable of wielding the powers of water and wind, surrounded Yuder.

“Yuder, what should we do now?”

“It’s similar to what we’ve been doing.”

However, they would need to focus more on suppressing and dividing the monster-laden wave rather than sending it to the surface.

Hearing Yuder’s anticipated explanation, the members’ faces paled, but they nodded without objection.

“Understood!”

Yuder turned his gaze towards Steiber, who was among them. Steiber, who had hurt his back during the ascent and had been groaning in pain, quickly approached Yuder in a manner not to arouse suspicion from the other members.

“Why? Do you have something more for me to do?”

Yuder looked at his face and spoke.

Steiber was at his limit and injured, and Yuder wondered if it was right to ask this of him. However, in the current situation, Steiber was the only one who could fully understand and assist with Yuder’s intention.

“As you know, we are not only facing the wave. I can handle the wave somehow. But the monsters that will come with it…”

Yuder’s power alone might not be enough to completely suppress them. Due to Yuder’s power being potentially weaker than the other members’ power when directly faced with monsters, there was a risk that monsters might particularly flock to his location, creating a problematic situation.

“Ah! That. Uh, I understand. Well, all I need to do is stick close to this side and pay more attention to the monsters, right?”

Before Yuder could finish explaining, Steiber grinned, indicating he understood exactly what was being asked of him, and clapped him on the shoulder. His response matched precisely what Yuder had hoped for.

“…Yes. That’s right. I know it will be hard, but I’m asking for your help.”

“Don’t worry. It’s going to be tough either way, might as well earn more trust from our Cavalry’s pride, right?”

“What?”

“Oh look, something seems to be rising over there.”

Steiber’s playful banter was interrupted by his sudden redirection of attention, pointing towards the distant sea. As he had indicated, the waves started to churn and swell in an unusual manner, signifying an impending change.

The vibrations, utterly different from those felt underwater, sent shivers through their bodies. It was a sinister scream of water and wind.

Yuder used his power to emerge from the water and stood firm.

“Everyone, spread out at a safe distance! Be ready!”

The members quickly dispersed around Yuder. Simultaneously, the sea churned violently, sinking downwards momentarily before erupting upwards like a fountain, then plunging back down again.

Sprays of water, like rain, were hurled around them.

“Ugh!”

“Argh!”

As the turbulent waters momentarily disrupted the balance of a few members, Yuder, standing unwaveringly, exerted his power to rescue them while observing the anomaly.

The size of the waves, surging and then collapsing, grew rapidly. Every nerve and sense was on high alert, signaling the imminent arrival of something significant.

‘…Soon.’

“Now!”

With Yuder’s raised hand, a colossal rumbling, like a giant wail, emanated from the depths of the sunken sea.

Whooosh…!

“Ah…!”

The members quickly looked up, stunned by the massive shadow cast over them. Like a giant beast rising from its crouch, an enormous wave suddenly loomed above their heads, gaping open like a monstrous maw.

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Chapter 969

Like a giant beast rising from its crouch, an enormous wave suddenly loomed above their heads, gaping open like a monstrous maw.

The waves that had surged until now were never small. However, the one rising at this moment seemed less like a wave and more like a living, gargantuan monster or an insurmountable wall.

What of the dark shadows writhing within the deep blue wall, swimming as if alive?

Before this spectacle, where the sky and sea appeared to have flipped sideways, humans seemed no more significant than mere specks of dust. What use was their effort against this overwhelming presence? Thoughts of being buried alive filled their minds, triggering instinctual alarms. A mix of intense fear and the desire to live made the members shudder uncontrollably.

They knew they had to do something, yet felt powerless.

Breathing became difficult. What could they possibly do in this situation?

In this terror, where the slightest movement seemed to risk everything collapsing…

What roused them was a cold, stern reprimand.

“Snap out of it! What are you doing?”

Even Steiber, who had been joking just moments ago, was spellbound. Only Yuder Aile confronted the situation head-on, displaying his strength. Water surged beneath him, and his body moved as if on its own, even as he stood still.

He didn’t retreat from the wave but charged towards the wall.

“Yuder!”

As he approached the wall of water, Yuder, who looked like he was skiing or sledding on water, bent his knees at the last moment and exerted more force.

Whoosh——

The members, witnessing Yuder smoothly ascend the watery wall, had an epiphany.

It wasn’t about using tremendous force. It was merely about utilizing the same force of water that firmly supported their feet below, a technique to ride the waves.

During their training in the sea, the members had often seen the residents of Charloin skillfully riding the waves with boards they had carved themselves. The waves they needed to climb now were excessively large and massive, but the act of riding waves itself was something even non-Awakeners could manage with just a board to step on.

‘That’s right. If we climb over that wall, we won’t be buried by the wave…!’

They could have easily performed such movements with their own power, but the overwhelming sight had stunned them, making them act like non-Awakeners. The members capable of using the power of water started to exert their power, realizing their lack of experience. Those who could use the power of wind also began to gather strength under their feet and started to ascend, stepping into the air. Although they couldn’t fly as long as the winged Elpkins, anyone who knew how to use the wind and had seen and learned from Yuder knew how to step on the wind.

The thought of charging towards the massive wall was still terrifying, almost insane, but they clenched their fists and persevered.

“Damn it! This is it, the real deal!”

“What’s the difference between dying once or twice? Let’s go!”

“Cavalry! Charge!”

Their shouts restored courage to the members. Following Yuder, they charged towards the wave. Soon, a remarkable scene unfolded with over a dozen people ascending the giant wall of water.

In the final, immense current that was visible even from the shore, the battle with the fourteenth current, later known as the ‘Blue Wall of Despair in the Charlama Sea’, began.

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On a hill a little away from the Charloin coastline, there was a medical tent.

It was a war zone in its own right, where only two medics of the Cavalry were stationed. There were those injured in battles with monsters, those who had collapsed from exhaustion, and even the priest who had fallen due to the depletion of his divine power.

Had it not been for Enon, who seemed all too familiar with such crises and maintained his composure, chaos would have broken out long ago.

“Sir Enon… Are you alright? I can get up and help now…”

Lusan, lying down due to the depletion of his divine power, murmured with a sheepish expression, to which Enon clicked his tongue and pushed him back down.

“Be quiet. When the time comes, I’ll make you work even if you don’t want to. Stay put as I told you.”

“But I really feel better now… There are still so many who need treatment…”

No matter how desperately Lusan pleaded, Enon remained unmoved. Eventually, Lusan gave up trying to get up and lay back down. He was still

dizzy and nauseous from experiencing divine power depletion for the first time.

However, looking around, there were many who were in more critical condition than just these symptoms. Those injured fighting monsters were relatively better off. The most serious were those who had collapsed from overexertion after pushing their Awakener abilities to the limit.

Lusan had often seen members of the Cavalry being transported for similar reasons during training. However, it was his first time seeing so many and such varied cases.

The side effects of pushing Awakener's abilities to their limits varied from person to person. Some, like Kanna Wand lying over there, started bleeding from all facial orifices, starting with nosebleeds. Others suddenly lost their sight or the use of their limbs, and there were even those who had convulsions and indiscriminately unleashed their powers in fits and starts. That person's ability involved physical transformation, so temporary barriers had to be erected to prevent harm to those around them.

There were also many with bizarre symptoms that made no sense in this context. Symptoms similar to exhaustion of non-Awakeners were considered a blessing.

To non-Awakeners who might see them, they looked like monsters to be feared. But Lusan did not fear or pity them, knowing they were this way because they were defending the South. He would grit his teeth in anger and even chase out the regular priests who came to help the Cavalry if they showed disrespect or fear.

Having endured years of unfair treatment in the Grand Temple without ever raising his voice, Lusan found that he could easily express anger for the Cavalry. He realized anew how much he had come to love the Cavalry.

His desire to continue helping was probably because of this, even though he had collapsed from the depletion of his divine power.

"Pharmacist, may I go now? I've been here too long."

Kanna, who had been lying not far away, got up and asked Enon. It was phrased as a request, but it was essentially an announcement.

While struggling to contain a nosebleed that could erupt at any moment, Kanna's face, half-hidden by a handkerchief, was so covered in dried, crimson bloodstains that her natural skin tone was nearly indiscernible. Despite not having time to properly clean and wash her face, Kanna stood resolutely, leaning on her staff and looking down from the hill.

Below the hill, Gakane was seen faintly, directing the members and maintaining continuous communication with those scattered around the area. Under normal circumstances, it would have been difficult for Kanna to read information from such a distance, but currently, her abilities were out of control, almost having gone on a rampage.

Information that she had blocked through grueling practice was now randomly flooding in and out of her mind regardless of distance. The process repeated itself arbitrarily, causing her intense headaches, yet it also allowed Kanna to understand Gakane's situation, which she found somewhat comforting.

Gakane, taking Kishiars' place on the shore and her own due to her collapse, was straining himself to the utmost to hold his position. He too was exhausted from overusing his abilities but was making every effort to give his friend a little more rest. This scene made it impossible for Kanna to remain lying down.

"If you go now, you'll collapse again."

"But I must go. I'll try to use my abilities as little as possible. I'm just going to help Gakane."

Kanna spoke calmly. Enon looked down at her, then let out a sound that was either a sigh or a curse, and handed her a pill.

"As if you're not his friend… If you're going, take this first."

"Yes."

Kanna accepted the pill from the pharmacist without hesitation or inquiry and swallowed it. She had been slightly worried that she might inadvertently read random information from Enon upon contact, but fortunately, nothing of the sort occurred from him.

'…Now that I think about it, has it always been like this around Enon?'

When she was near individuals with stronger powers than herself, like Kishiar, Yuder, or Nathan Zuckerman, direct information about them seldom came through. The day she unexpectedly read personal information from Yuder's glove was an anomaly. Even that special case had been so unbearable that it drove her to train frantically to control her abilities.

But it seemed that the same was true with the pharmacist in front of her. Did this mean that Enon also possessed some kind of power? Kanna pondered this briefly, but her train of thought was quickly interrupted by the influx of information flooding her mind, causing her to stagger and gasp for breath.

Fortunately, thanks to Enon's medicine, her head wasn't as painfully throbbing as before. The pain relief was surprisingly quick.

"Thank you. I'll be going now."

With that, Kanna turned and left the medical tent. As soon as she did, her thoughts about Enon naturally faded and vanished from her mind.

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Chapter 970

“Gakane!”

“Kanna, you’re here already? You still don’t look well…” Gakane said as Kanna joined him, shaking her head at the worries pouring in from those around her, her face devoid of any hint of a smile as she opened her mouth to speak.

“The Deputy Commander can’t be away forever. I should be involved too. The biggest issue right now is identifying and repairing the damaged parts of the breakwater, right?”

Kanna’s flow of conversation was so natural, as if she had just been in a meeting with them until now. People were inwardly surprised to see her talking as if she knew everything without even listening to any explanations, but only Gakane calmly nodded his head.

“That’s right. With just the members we have now, it’s difficult to identify and fix everything.”

The current problem that Gakane was engrossed in was the breakwater collapse-related matters discovered during the process of assessing and gathering forces after Kishiar left his position. The tall breakwaters that the Cavalry members had built with the Imperial Army had faithfully served its role in preventing waves and monsters from the sea from reaching the town. However, the problem was that after continuously blocking thirteen attacks, some parts had collapsed, and holes had formed inside during the process.

If all the cavalry members were here and in full strength, they could have quickly assessed and repaired the state. But now, not only were there few available personnel, but their strength was also lacking, and there wasn’t even enough time.

Unlike the members who were anxious about the desperate situation, Gakane’s expression showed no signs of wavering. Kanna stared at her

friend’s face and asked,

“Gakane, do you have any ideas in mind?”

“Hmm… Fortunately, the breakwaters in other areas are fine. It’s just the ones in Charloin that are problematic.”

“Yeah.”

“I’m thinking of asking Elpkins to bring over Captain Sunz for a while.”

Captain Sunz was currently in charge of the town most vulnerable and lowest in elevation. The town had been affected several times by tremors starting from the sea, causing the land to sink or monsters carried by the waves to head there, but thanks to Sunz’s vision abilities, no one had suffered major harm yet.

“It would be great if he could come… but is he in a state to use his abilities?”

“I just exchanged news with him; he seems okay for a short while. And there’s a medical tent right behind us here, so if any problem arises, it’s easy to go for treatment immediately.”

Kanna nodded after a moment’s thought. The medical unit of the Cavalry only had two people, but she knew firsthand just how exceptional those two were.

“If he’s here, we can immediately identify the most problematic parts. Then, how do we fix it?”

“Hmm… We can’t dismantle the breakwater and rebuild it meticulously right away. But… I was thinking of a similar temporary measure.”

“Something similar?”

With a sheepish smile, Gakane scanned the faces of a few members around. A small realization dawned on Kanna as she recognized the faces identified by Gakane.

“Ah! I see.”

The abilities of those Gakane had pointed out weren’t strong physical strength or flashy attributes. They had somewhat unique powers, like changing the position of objects they touched or temporarily extending and shrinking certain objects. And most of them were under Kanna’s command in the Jung Division.

These members, whose powers weren’t necessary to exert continuously in battle situations, had managed to last this long. However, if used cleverly, these powers could surely fill the unseen holes and gaps in the breakwater.

“…Us?”

“What are we going to do? Can we really do this with just us?”

“Of course. Think about it. Once Captain Sunz arrives and points out the weak spots, all you need to do is insert and enlarge the stones at those spots. Simple, isn’t it?”

Indeed, considering it was thought up in a hurry, it was a decent temporary solution. Yet, even with that thought, the members hesitated for a moment, exchanging uncertain looks.

“I’m having trouble controlling my power right now. If I make a mistake… might the entire breakwater collapse?”

“Those who built it, the gods and their kin, might know the internal structure, but we don’t…”

“No, we can definitely do it. Kanna is here too. Just help me this once, okay?”

Gakane, noticing the wavering confidence of the members, patted their arms and smiled brightly. His genuinely effective and kind smile eased their hesitations.

‘Gakane… Poor guy. Right. He’s struggling like this in place of the Commander… We should help if we’re needed.’

“Alright, I’ll give it a try!”

“Thank you.”

Members of the Jung Division, unlike the Shin and Sul Divisions, were neither numerous nor unified in their abilities, which varied greatly, leading to a lesser sense of belonging. However, having belonged to the same division for a long time and assisted each other in training, they were well-acquainted with each other’s capabilities. This familiarity was undoubtedly going to be of assistance when the need to combine their powers in urgent situations arose.

And the ones who knew them best were undoubtedly Kanna, the Deputy Commander of the Jung Division.

“Now, you all heard what Gakane said, right? When Captain Sunz arrives, I’ll read the information with him, understand what he has identified, and relay it to you. We don’t have to succeed in one go, so let’s be cautious and thorough.”

“Understood.”

“But what if… what if we can’t fix it all and another wave comes?”

A member, known for his cautious nature, furrowed his brows and asked. Gakane scratched his head, his smile slightly different from before.

“Well… don’t worry about that and continue the work. I’ll do whatever it takes to protect you until it’s finished.”

“Gakane, you will?…”

It was rare for the usually cautious Gakane to step forward and make such a guarantee. But it was this rarity that paradoxically offered a mysterious reassurance to others.

Kanna looked into her friend’s eyes. Somehow, she could guess Gakane’s resolve without him using his powers.

‘He’s planning to use the shadow curtain he created on the day of the hailstorm.’

Back then, Gakane had created an enormous, powerful barrier strong enough to contain the rampaging Nahan. It was believed to be possible only with Kishiar’s help, but now it seemed Gakane had decided to recreate it using his strength alone.

Gakane was already so exhausted, but could he really do it? After pondering for a moment, Kanna nodded decisively.

‘He can do it. Who else but us, trained personally by…’

This wasn’t a baseless hope, just clinging to optimism. Kanna knew how persistently Gakane worked; he must have been relentlessly practicing to deploy and maintain the shadow curtain secretly ever since the day of the hailstorm. That’s just who he was.

Since Gakane had judged himself capable and decided to try, as the Deputy Commander, Kanna could only offer her support.

“Understood. If you say you’ll keep going until the end, I’ll count on you.”

As Kanna voiced her trust with a weighty tone, the attitudes of the other members solidified as well. If Kanna, who knew the most information among them and was close to Gakane, had such faith in him, there certainly must be a good reason for it.

“Alright. Let’s do this!”

Together, they clapped their hands, shouting words of encouragement, and hurried towards the breakwater. Soon after, Elpkins arrived with Sunz in tow. Emon, who had recovered from exhaustion and was mingling among the people, greeted him.

“Sunz! I’ve never been so relieved to see your face.”

“Emon, just a moment… My stomach is… ugh.”

Despite his very pale face from the novel experience of flying in someone's arms, Sunz clearly knew what he had to do. Swallowing his rising nausea, he closed his eyes and focused on the breakwater. A faint, mist-like energy flickered around his eyes.

"Captain Sunz, can you see where the problems are?"

"Yes. I see them. There seem to be about five critical spots."

Opening his eyes, which now induced dizziness from the side effects of his used powers, Sunz, supported by Emon's back, gasped for air but managed to stutteringly convey what he saw and the exact locations of the gaps within the damaged breakwater.

To anyone else, understanding Sunz's explanations through words alone would have been difficult, but Kanna Wand, right in front of him, was different. Supporting Sunz and using her powers, Kanna visualized the breakwater in her mind, turning Sunz's descriptions into precise information.

"Alright. I understand. Now go get treated and rest."

Then, without hesitation, Kanna gathered her Division members.

"It feels like our Division and Yuder have done similar training before, though I'm not sure if you remember. This time, though, it's the real deal. Shall we start?"

Initially, there were several trials and errors, naturally. Transferring stones into the invisible interior of the breakwater to plug the holes was no easy task. A few times, the breakwater even seemed to totter on the brink of collapse.

But, eventually, they began to succeed, one by one.

Gakane, intensely focused all this while, watched over them, ready to assist at any moment.

And then, it was when they had left just two of the largest gaps.

Rumble…

“Gakane! Over there… something strange is coming from afar…!”

A foreboding vibration rolled in from the sea, and in the distance, a strange blue wall loomed ominously.

It was, of course, the fourteenth and final wave.

Just as one of the Division members flinched, his powers wavering, Gakane shouted with a firm voice.

“Don’t look that way. I’ll handle it for you!”

“…Got it!”

Gakane exerted his power. Shadows stretched forth from beneath him, enveloping the breakwater, the members, and Kanna, then surged upwards, creating a wall even larger than the breakwater itself.

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Chapter 971

Shadows stretched forth from beneath him, enveloping the breakwater, the members, and Kanna, then surged upwards, creating a wall even larger than the breakwater itself.

“My goodness.”

“Gakane, that guy… He still had that much strength left?”

Several members, not far from the scene, inadvertently let out a gasp as they beheld the shadow wall. The wall, erected by Gakane, appeared so dense and sturdy that it seemed it could replace the breakwater should it fall.

In hindsight, Gakane Bolunwald was undoubtedly a skilled and tenacious member, often one of the last to leave during the Cavalry’s group training. Despite knowing all this, his approachable nature, handsome appearance that often sparked more conversations than his skills, and the notable people around him, made it hard to believe he came from a prestigious noble family. Somehow, this overshadowed his reputation as a skilled fighter.

Reflecting on it now, he was almost the only one who had endured an entire day of battle without once visiting the medical tent. His ability to calmly and promptly respond to the continuous flow of reports from various fronts, and his quick thinking of temporary measures during the current breakwater repair situation, had been enough to astonish even those members who had considered themselves close to Gakane.

The members felt the unease they had unavoidably felt due to the absence of the Commander, Yuder, and the Deputy Commanders being offset.

While Gakane maintained the wall, Kanna, without blinking an eye, put all her effort into directing the repair of the breakwater. Her handkerchief, covering her face, started to turn red again with nosebleed, yet her demeanor remained unshaken.

Meanwhile, those observing the giant wave swelling in the distance approached Gakane with grave expressions and whispered.

“Gakane. That thing in the distance… it looks like…”

“Yeah. Probably the fourteenth wave.”

Gakane replied softly, gazing at the distant sea.

“The Commander and Yuder haven’t returned yet, and with such a huge wave… What if something has happened to them? What should we do here?”

“What to do? Just what we can.”

Gakane wiped the sweat trickling down his temple and looked down.

“The Commander already told us what we need to do. If we run out of strength, we’ll retreat towards the forest on that side and climb up the trees in advance to prepare. We should move more people to the medical camp to protect it…”

“And you?”

“I’ll stay here to keep this wall up until the repairs are done and everyone has had a chance to retreat.”

The dark blue wall, undulating like the sea itself, grew larger. Even as the fog hovering over the sea thickened, obscuring the horizon, the fact that it remained clearly visible was an ominous sign. The closer it seemed to approach, the taller it appeared, rather than diminishing, sending shivers down the spine just by looking at it.

Quietly assessing the change, Gakane mustered more strength. The shadow wall in front of the breakwater leaped higher again.

“Are you sure you’ll be alright alone? We could stay with you…”

“No. I appreciate the thought, but I’ll be fine. There’s only one part left to repair, and it’s more likely we’ll finish it before the wave reaches here. So it’s better for you to go ahead now and then help us when we retreat and join you later.”

As the members hesitated, even knowing Gakane was right, he shouted while still fixing his gaze on the sea.

“Sir Zuckerman from the forest must have already heard the news and will be here soon. You all need to go now!”

“Alright!”

The members turned and ran. Gakane continued to watch the repairs on the breakwater and the dark blue wall in the distant sea, biting his lip.

‘I’ve done all I can… But knowing that Sir Zuckerman will back us up gives me some peace of mind. After all, he is a swordmaster…’

Nathan Zuckerman, after Kishiar had left, stayed by Gakane’s side, assisting with urgent communications and discussions. He was currently guarding a position midway between Marin’s forest and the seashore. Although not a member of the Cavalry, Zuckerman, Kishiar’s adjutant and a swordmaster, was the most reliable presence there.

The Cavalry members might not fully grasp the extent of Nathan’s strength, but Gakane, who was secretly learning swordsmanship from him, knew well how formidable he was.

‘I’m not saying I’m not intimidated by him… But fortunately, I know he’s a good man.’

Nathan Zuckerman usually stayed behind Kishiar, not drawing much attention. His imposing height and not-so-sociable demeanor were intimidating enough to others, and this only intensified after it became known that he was a swordmaster.

However, the Nathan Zuckerman Gakane knew through his swordsmanship lessons was surprisingly gentle and extremely fair. Gakane had seen countless knights who would show off and begrudge teaching even the basic movements of swordsmanship to their squires, but Nathan was unlike any of them.

Even when Gakane had pleaded to learn, expecting at least some rough treatment, there was none. Nathan never praised him for doing well, but he also never got angry at him for doing poorly. Such teachers are often thought to be indifferent, and Gakane initially thought the same, but Nathan was different.

Busy as he was, Nathan could pinpoint what was wrong with just a few observations of Gakane's practice. Bad habits Gakane himself wasn't aware of, or directions for improvement, were all captured in Nathan's brief instructions. His quiet nature and almost unchanging expressions did not mean indifference, and Gakane felt inwardly moved by this realization.

If Yuder's teaching was about rolling with the punches until one subconsciously knew what to do, then Nathan's was more about sharply pointing out deficiencies to foster self-realization. Different yet somehow similar, the teachings of both these men had enabled Gakane's growth to this point.

'Yuder… he must be safe.'

Gakane sighed, thinking of his friend out at sea. The approaching giant blue wall genuinely frightened him. But with Yuder and others out there, he couldn't flee.

It was then that it happened.

Rumble!

The subtle vibration underfoot suddenly intensified, causing those repairing the last breach in the breakwater to stagger.

"Whoa…!"

As one member faltered and fell, losing control of his power, it affected the inside of the breakwater.

The stones piled on the breakwater emitted an ominous sound and shook violently. A heavy top stone that had been resting on the very top cracked and plunged down towards the heads of the members who were making repairs.

“No!”

Instinctively, Gakane twisted the shadow wall to envelop the members. While he could protect them, the trembling breakwater was beyond his power to stabilize.

‘Is the repair doomed to fail… Did my suggestion unnecessarily endanger my friends who could have escaped earlier?’ These thoughts flickered briefly through his mind as he shut his eyes in despair.

“…”

Just as the breakwater seemed about to collapse, it suddenly stopped shaking. The large stone that was about to strike Gakane’s shadow barrier also paused in mid-air.

As if forcefully yanked back into place, the stones hovered momentarily before snapping back to their original positions. Simultaneously, a sharp cheer erupted from behind the shadow wall.

“We did it! We succeeded!”

‘What…?’

Gakane withdrew the shadow barrier. The Jung Division members and Kanna, who had continued to exert their powers on the breakwater even while surrounded by the dark wall, looked towards him with faces bright and disheveled.

As Gakane had requested, they had trusted him and did not stop repairing the breakwater regardless of the situation. Those who had not seen what had

happened to the breakwater were now beaming.

“Gakane! We did it! You can retract it now!”

While Gakane blinked in dazed surprise, a voice nearby spoke.

“Good, I’m not too late. You took a dangerous risk, focusing on protecting others without securing yourself.”

Gakane nearly burst into tears at that moment.

“Commander!”

Soaked and battered, it was undoubtedly Kishiar La Orr. Finally, he had returned.

Following him, a small boat emerged through the mist near the breakwater. Familiar comrades were aboard the boat that had drawn close.

“Commander. There’s a new wave from afar… Sir Zuckerman is…”

As Gakane stumbled through his report, Kishiar smiled faintly.

“I know. You’ve done well. Leave the rest to me, and you can step back now.”

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Chapter 972

“I know. You’ve done well. Leave the rest to me, and you can step back now.”

Upon hearing these words, a sense of relief washed over him, draining all the strength from his body. Gakane deeply bowed his head in salute.

“…Thank you! From now on, I will step back and guard your side, Commander!”

In truth, he wanted to apologize. He felt ashamed for not being able to fill the Commander’s absence adequately and wanted to beg for forgiveness for not living up to the trust placed in him.

But now was not the time for such thoughts. Gakane decided to withdraw, relieved that his comrades were unharmed and Kishiar did not seem to have sustained serious injuries.

However, just as he was about to turn away, Kishiar unexpectedly turned his head and called out to Gakane.

“Gakane Bolunwald.”

“…Yes?”

“I had anticipated that the breakwater would reach its limit even before we departed. I thought it was inevitable that it would break under strain, but finding and implementing a quick repair solution was beyond my expectations. Well done.”

Gakane’s face and neck turned a bright red after a brief silence.

“Ah… That was just a temporary measure. It was thanks to Kanna and the others who didn’t stop even amidst danger that we could…”

“There’s no need to deny that coming up with the initial solution was impressive.”

Kishiar interrupted Gakane and said this before lightly patting his shoulder. That light touch felt like the world-shaking to Gakane.

“You did better than expected in a difficult situation.”

Kishiar turned away. Gakane stood there dumbfounded for a few seconds before lifting his trembling hands to his face and silently screaming.

‘Ah… Aaaah.’

He felt like his body could burst from the blood rushing through him. He was too happy, yet unsure whether it was appropriate to feel such joy in this situation, leaving him breathless.

Throughout his life, there were many times he wanted to hide somewhere out of sight due to burdensome expectations based on his appearance and background. He often wished someone else who looked just like him but could meet those expectations would take his place.

But now, for the first time, he felt an overwhelming joy that made him want to hide.

The shadows under Gakane’s feet writhed around his ankles before returning to their normal shape. He ran energetically towards Kanna and the other members, as well as those disembarking from the ship.

“Don’t rush! I’ll help!”

“Your Grace.”

Soon, Nathan Zuckerman and Hellem reached Kishiar. Kishiar refused the towel offered by his adjutant to dry his sea-drenched body.

“It’s better to send that to Mick in the medical unit.”

“Understood.”

His adjutant, knowing his lord's temperament well, did not insist further. Hellem asked with a slight concern in her eyes.

"Mick… to the medical unit, is he badly injured?"

"It was inevitable, given his pursuit of danger. I'm only sorry since he overexerted himself because of me. But thanks to him, we could successfully complete our task."

"Ah, that boy finally did something worthwhile for his lord. There's no need for you to apologize, Your Grace."

Despite her sharp words, Hellem glanced toward the medical unit's tent. She seemed genuinely concerned, though she soon turned her gaze towards the blue wall rising from the distant sea.

"Is that the final wave?"

"Yes."

"I didn't expect it to be so large. It seems even the last one is putting up a strong fight. This won't be easy."

"Indeed. How much of the magic traps prepared by the mages do we have left?"

"I wish I could say we have enough, but the magic power is meager, and there's a limit to what we can create here, so regrettably, we don't have much left."

"Still, having some is enough. Spread what's left as wide as possible near the sea."

"Understood."

"After that, you and the mages should immediately move to higher ground."

After giving these instructions, Kishiar turned to Nathan Zuckerman.

“Nathan.”

“Yes.”

“Over there, near that wave, Yuder and the others are present. Can you see them?”

“…The fog is thick, it’s difficult to pinpoint their exact location.”

“The wave is higher than expected. It might even grow larger from there. But a higher wave doesn’t mean it’s without vulnerabilities to exploit.”

“Do you have a plan?”

“Soon, that wave will split into several paths. The members over there will make it happen. That will be the perfect opportunity for a diversionary operation to reduce the wave’s height and deal with as many monsters inside it as possible in one go.”

Kishiar didn’t specify who would do it, talking as if the success of this almost fantastical assumption was a given, as if Yuder’s presence there made it obvious.

“So, we’ll wait for it to split and then release our aura from here.”

After uttering words beyond the imagination of ordinary minds, Kishiar fell silent, giving Nathan Zuckerman time to think. Nathan, gazing out to the sea, spoke.

“So, we must perform the sea-splitting feat that you, my lord, showed yesterday once again.”

“Similar. But this time, not from here, but from a higher position.”

Kishiar pointed upwards with his finger.

“I will lift you and me up. We must do it even without solid ground beneath our feet. Can you handle it?”

A slow change crossed the previously expressionless face of Nathan Zuckerman. He answered firmly, not as an adjutant or a servant, but as a fearless swordsman.

“If I couldn’t, I wouldn’t deserve to be called a swordmaster.”

“Good. It’s reassuring to have a well-trained adjutant at times like this.”

Laughing, Kishiar ruffled Nathan Zuckerman’s hair and rolled up his sleeves.

“Thinking this might be the last gift Yuder sends me feels somewhat regrettable. Well, let’s get ready.”

The two men, swords drawn as if by mutual understanding, walked resolutely towards the sea.

From atop the high wave, the earth below seemed like a speck of dust in a precarious fog, as insignificant and transient as the world viewed from a serene mountaintop.

Yet, beneath their feet, there was neither peace nor quiet. Yuder, bracing against the lashing spray and wind that seemed ready to tear his flesh and swallow him whole, stared coldly at the massive wave.

‘Damned thing. It’s like it’s sucking in the surrounding water, continuously rising.’

As if to bury the world in water if it couldn’t overturn it with an earthquake, the wave, despite being buffeted by Yuder and his companions’ efforts, continued to grow, as if in defiance.

As if the inevitable was bound to happen.

Kishiar had thought the aftermath of the underwater crack’s collapse wouldn’t have such an impact, but the miscalculation proved painfully significant.

Yet, the path was already chosen. Even if he could go back, he would likely make the same choice, so he decided not to regret it.

‘Just need to resolve it.’

How did Kishiar and the other members come this far?

Yuder was determined not to let this wave crash over the land and engulf the entire south.

He had overturned many events in a direction opposite to his previous life. None had been easy, and this time was no different. Thus, this occasion wouldn’t be an exception.

Red mists surged from Yuder’s entire body.

‘Settle down. Split!’

The sea screamed under his power.

Kuaaaaaaaah!

‘How can he go to such lengths…’

Steiber, who was lending his strength near Yuder, lost his words for a moment in front of the erupting vigor. How could anyone not be overwhelmed by the sight of Yuder, looking like a mix between a man and a water pillar, furiously wrestling with the waves? Even if he failed after doing so much, no one could blame him. But Yuder, at this moment, seemed like a man with nothing left behind him, extracting his abilities like a fiend.

The strongest person among them was using his strength more desperately and earnestly than anyone else. It was a blindly incomprehensible sight, as if displayed by a young man who did not have a family to protect and who might not yet fully understand the weight of a great cause. Where did that tremendous willpower and intense sense of purpose endlessly spring from? It was curious because it was unknowable, and the more curious Steiber became, the more he wanted to lend his strength to this desperate person.

Steiber exerted his power against the small monsters that kept leaping from the waves under Yuder's feet, trying to entwine around his ankles. The creatures that couldn't penetrate the force of the other members or his own were easily breaching Yuder's defenses to attack him. With just a bit of force, the monsters captured by Steiber's power were crushed, screaming painfully before flattening and sinking.

Even amidst such chaos, Yuder, with terrifying concentration and without a backward glance, continued to exert his strength, followed by even greater force.

The wave surged. Yuder Aile's power repeatedly flew to put a bridle on it for stopping. The members added their strength, creating a larger and denser snare, and the water and wind danced viciously, intertwined.

Steiber thought several times that the next moment might truly be his last. If his strength failed and he plunged into the wave, that would be his end.

But at the same time, seeing Yuder's solid back made him want to gather strength in his knees to follow, as if he had returned to his vigorous youth. He wanted to split this damned wave with the young man.

And finally,

The moment Yuder's newly launched power combined with others, spreading what seemed like the umpteenth snare over the wave.

What seemed like another futile attempt felt like it caught onto something, as the wave wobbled with an unfamiliar movement.

"Finally, we've caught it! Don't stop, everyone!"

Yuder shouted, seizing the opportunity. His eye fiercely glinted golden.

The wave finally began to split into several paths.

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Chapter 973

The wave finally began to split into several paths.

“Be careful not to fall down!”

If one had to face the world’s largest waterfall with their bare body, would it be this breathtaking? On top of the huge wave that surged up and down, writhing and gradually splitting into several branches, the members tried their best not to fall while relentlessly exerting their abilities.

While the water-wielding ability users spat blood from their mouths and added strength to Yuder, it was the wind ability users who continuously held the reins and applied the brakes to slow down the speed of the splitting waves, protecting those who were doing so.

“I’ll catch Steiber, so you guys keep shooting against the wind!”

Yergin Schiller, in charge of commanding the wind wielders present that day, shouted with a hoarse voice, stepping on the wind and leaping. Swaying but quickly crossing the waves, she supported Steiber’s back, who was about to fall into the water at any moment, from behind Yuder and supported his arm with a narrow margin. Relying on the power of the wind alone to support a person’s weight in the spray of water, she let out an involuntary suppressed groan, unaware of her own pain.

Whoosh……!

Following Yergin’s instructions, a transparent wind arrow swirling at the tip of Phieny Moffle’s fingers, who had aimed the bow she was holding, was created. The arrow, which contained a strong whirlwind, soon flew toward the waves beyond with a loud bang. The condensed wind mercilessly hit the wave that was about to engulf Yuder, briefly slowing down its rushing speed.

Taking advantage of that gap, Yuder’s golden eye, which shone brightly enough to be clearly distinguished even in the fog, met Phieny Moffle’s for a very short moment. The brief gaze soon drifted away again, but Phieny smiled.

Months ago, she had accidentally dropped a pouch containing a wrist guard her late mother had made at the training ground shared with the Imperial Knights. When she returned to retrieve it, the Knights, whose training time had ended, coldly refused her entry and drove her away.

It was her colleagues from the Sul Division and Yuder Aile who had stood up for her when she was helpless and unable to do anything. Without them, how could she have returned to the training ground, reclaimed her wrist guard, and exacted her bold revenge on the Knights she had feared?

Until then, Phieny had thought herself too quiet and timid to fit in with the Cavalry. However, her heart completely changed as she shot arrows at the buttocks of those who tried to harm her precious wrist guard and burst into laughter.

She had thought herself lesser compared to Yuder and the other members, but it wasn’t true. Phieny Moffle was indeed a rightful member of the Cavalry, no different from the rest.

Since that day, the usually timid Phieny Moffle, often suffering from homesickness, transformed. She never let go of that wrist guard, practicing fiercely, even sleeping with it and her bow. She repeatedly sought Yuder for advice on improving her skills.

Thanks to this, the Phieny Moffle standing here today had become a master, capable of endlessly firing wind arrows that she could originally use only about five times a day.

Yuder Aile might not have thought much of that day’s events, but Phieny was overjoyed and happy now that she could fully support what he intended to do. As she shot more arrows, the sharp wind that grazed her arm and the arrow shaft multiplied her wounds, spattering blood, and blurring her vision, but she considered it to be alright.

Phieny clenched her teeth, grabbing the bow that kept slipping from her hands again. Her arrows, made of wind, could be shot continuously as long as she had strength, unaffected by external forces. However, the bow, being a physical object, would break and warp if overused. The one she was currently using was already cracked and twisted, seeming like it would shatter with just a bit more use.

‘Just until the waves subside… Please hold on a little longer…!’

She was about to readjust her grip on the bow, gasping for breath, when she heard Yuder Aile’s voice somewhere.

“Everyone, prepare not to fall.”

His voice, transmitted using the power of the wind like theirs, was terribly hoarse but carried an unusual weight, drawing their attention.

Phieny turned to see Yuder Aile looking somewhere. As she turned her head to follow his gaze, suddenly, the air around her became still.

A figure, whom she hadn’t thought would be here, appeared faintly through the mist in the distance.

‘…Commander? And… who’s next to him…?’

“…Sir Zuckerman, isn’t it?”

A colleague using his powers next to Phieny muttered in disbelief. Phieny also realized then that the person near Kishiar, slightly apart, was Nathan Zuckerman.

As if they had climbed invisible stairs, they stood on empty air with their feet. When everyone blinked their eyes as if enchanted by the appearance of the two men who appeared like an illusion, forgetting even the urgent reality, the two men simultaneously raised their swords high.

Then, with the same movement but in opposite directions, they swung them down.

A bright blue light flashed momentarily, and then all was silent.

-……

No sound was heard.

No one could see clearly how they swung.

Nevertheless, the result of that simple single movement changed everything a moment later.

Kwaaaaaaaaa!!!

The members screamed and came to their senses on the collapsing waves, which bent and crumbled as if their waists had been cut in an instant.

“Aaah!”

“Open your eyes! I told you to prepare! Get on top of the waves!”

Phieny, hearing another colleague’s shout, reflexively jumped up, stepping on the wind. Had she not heard Yuder’s voice first, she would have been too startled to react immediately. Even so, her strength waned halfway, and she nearly fell, but a gust of wind from somewhere supported and protected her. It was obviously Yuder.

‘Yuder!’

Turning to where Yuder Aile should be, Phieny gasped at the unexpected scene.

‘Ah…’

There he was, relentlessly exerting his power without pausing for even a moment in the perilous situation where the waves he rode were being sliced apart and monsters were bursting forth.

While everyone was surprised and disoriented by this unforeseen situation, unable to exert their powers properly, Yuder Aile alone seemed unfazed, as

if he had anticipated this, not even blinking.

Phieny, momentarily losing herself, felt a desire to whip herself back into focus and gathered her powers once more.

Beyond the mist, the shadows of the Commander and Nathan Zuckerman had vanished as if they were never there. However, judging by the waves that had lost their momentum and were now clearly splitting into several branches, what had just transpired was undoubtedly reality.

“Divide the personnel! Each person should take charge of the branching waves based on their current position! Try to slow down the speed as much as possible and keep lowering the height!”

Steiber’s shout, carried to everyone’s ears on Yergin Schiller’s wind, echoed from afar. The members skillfully confirmed each other’s positions and took their places.

The five split waves, racing towards the southern coast, were pouring and rushing forward, but they no longer possessed the terrifying ferocity of before.

Phieny, standing atop the farthest wave on the right, cast one last glance towards Yuder, who was on the largest wave in the center. The wave she stood on, being the smallest, visibly lost height and force as it approached the ground, unlike the one Yuder was on.

The wave, though diminished and weakened, still surged high like a galloping horse. The sight of it about to engulf the harbor sent chills down her spine.

‘…Hopefully, everyone can hold out till the end.’

Amidst her worries, the waves disappeared into the fog, moving further away.

Yuder, now on a wave that had lost much of its momentum compared to before, squeezed out the last of his strength as he watched the ground

gradually approaching. Although the height had significantly decreased, at this rate, the wave would still surpass the breakwater and engulf the harbor. However, he was not as worried as he had been earlier.

Beyond the harbor, the man who had just “greeted” him in anticipation of his arrival was waiting. Everything they had prepared would be there to welcome Yuder; now all that remained was to leave everything in their hands.

Yuder took a deep breath and looked down.

The moment his power reined in the wave for the last time, the greatly overturned wave crashed down upon the breakwater of Charloin.

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Chapter 974

The greatly overturned wave crashed down upon the breakwater of Charloin.

The strength to hold on faltered, and the body, as if flung away, bent and flew through the air.

Within the current, monsters writhed, clamoring and leaping in their frenzy to devour Yuder.

At this point, Yuder lacked the strength to confront them. Yet, he harbored no worry. For a hand, appearing from somewhere, had scooped him up without a moment's hesitation, pulling him close.

Yuder, yielding to the owner of the rescuing hand, gasped for breath for a long while. Opening his eyes, he saw, through his damp, clinging bangs, the face of the man who had plucked him from the water. Both their faces, his and Yuder's, were indescribably disheveled.

Despite this, Yuder had never felt as content as he did at this moment in his life.

He leaned his forehead into the embrace of Kishiar, exhaling deeply. The man, resting his head above Yuder's, asked in a hoarse whisper,

"Just now, if I had been even a little late, you would have been swallowed by the waves. What would you have done if I hadn't arrived in time to meet you?"

"I saw you coming out to greet me earlier… There's no way that could have happened."

Yuder's voice, too, was as strained as Kishiar's.

"My, my. You trust me too much."

“Then whom else should I trust?”

Kishiar did not reply. Yuder felt a slight pleasure in having silenced the man who was so difficult to defeat with words. The man, softening his eyebrows, chuckled silently, shrugging his shoulders. Yuder realized that he, too, was smiling, as reflected in the man’s eyes.

“…I’ve returned.”

“Indeed.”

The man, embracing Yuder more tightly, looked down at the waves churning at their feet.

“It might be a close call, but… thankfully, they won’t reach the height of the medical tent on the hill. It’s the perfect spot to watch from.”

There was no need to ask what they would be watching.

Yuder had felt a similar sentiment during the hailstorm. His strength was depleted, and like Kishiar, he could only observe the situation in their disheveled state.

However, unlike that time, his heart was now incomparably calm and at peace.

Yuder, looking down at the waves, slowly nodded.

“…Yes.”

The waves, which might have otherwise swept over the land unobstructed, clean and engulfing everything, met their first challenge at the breakwater, erected like a fortress wall around the harbor.

Boom……! Crash……!

The sound of water colliding with stone was so tremendous it was hard to believe, shaking the entire world. But the breakwater, reinforced internally by the efforts of the members of the Jung Division, did not easily crumble.

The waves, having lost their most powerful moment due to the breakwater's persistent resistance, had their momentum slightly dampened as they barely managed to pass over it.

Whoosh……

The wave, carrying both dead and living monsters, faced its second challenge shortly after.

Boom, boom boom boom!

As soon as the magic tools, which had been widely buried around the sea under Hellem's instructions, came into contact with the monsters in the water, they all began to explode simultaneously. Each time a magic tool containing the poison of the long-tailed Penpen burst, a dark liquid spread widely, staining the translucent monsters and instantly slowing their movements.

Previously, when the waves had not risen this high, the poison had only managed to stain a few monsters.

However, now that the water completely covered the land and crept forward, the Penpen's poison instead spread rapidly over a wider area, successfully performing its role beyond expectations. With just a small amount of magic tools, the monsters in the water were instantly stained and their presence became clearly distinguishable even from a distance.

The third ordeal faced by the waves occurred just before they advanced further to engulf the low-lying settlements.

"…Everyone, be ready!"

Marin, perched atop a tall tree, swallowed a tense breath, feeling a thrill among those who, like her, were preparing for attack, either hanging or standing on the trees.

"Here it comes!"

With a fierce sound, the surging wave collided head-on with the forest.

“Ugh!” “Argh!”

Here and there, those clinging to the trees, submerged in water, let out strained groans.

Yet, Marin’s densely grown forest did not falter against the waves. It was because the roots of the forest, tightly grown and supporting each other, forcibly upheld the soggy, unstable ground of the southern region.

In some ways, the trees, supporting each other, were more effective than a breakwater, protecting the settlement behind them and giving the exhausted humans hope to counterattack against nature and monsters.

“We will protect our settlement!”

Ordinary soldiers and knights, lacking any special abilities, launched long, sharpened sticks like spears and hurled heavy stones from the trees to protect the settlement.

They had been doing the same thing since the previous waves had struck. Although they now had to cling to the treetops and avoid the rising water under their feet, unlike before when they only had to deal with a few monsters, the task itself was the same, so it was not difficult.

Small monsters, infected with the venom, exploded and lost their power with just that level of attack. Like water strained through a sieve, the wave also gradually lost its momentum in front of the forest, hesitating and failing to advance further.

The people, encouraged by this fact, shouted loudly. Those who had previously hidden behind the Awakeners, fearing them, now stepped forward to play their part without seeking their protection.

And behind them, swordmaster Nathan Zuckerman was busy confronting the monsters that had broken through.

He stood as a heavy yet sturdy sword, ensuring that no monster could enter where the residents of Charloin had taken refuge. No enemy could surpass

his sword.

While this wave struggled to breach Charloin, other waves that had split from the main one and swept into different areas faced similar counterattacks.

The counterattackers stationed in Marin’s forest, collaborating with the Cavalry brought by the waves, exerted their final strength, each in their own way.

Kurga, who faced Steiber, struck with a fist as hard as a rock, piercing a large hole in the wave at once. Of course, the water quickly filled up the hole again, but the brutally powerful single attack instantly reduced the momentum of the wave.

Sunz, having chewed the medicine received from the medical unit and returned with Elpkins, protected their assigned area alongside Emon, who had followed him out of concern. The two, knowing each other’s abilities better than anyone, covered each other’s weaknesses and overcame the difficult moments.

In another region, Ever adeptly commanded her members, systematically and relentlessly bursting and killing every monster. The tips of her fingers, except for the palms protected by monster armor, were bloodstained, yet her attacks, slow but sure, never ceased.

At the same time, another swordmaster of the Empire, Gino Bordelli, looked upon his former disciple, now bound and forced to kneel.

“Master! This is all a setup! That treacherous Meghna Kurlieva has framed me to bring me down! How could I possibly be a traitor? It’s unfair!”

“Galexentre. Do you know where Meghna is right now, what she’s doing?”

Galexentre Balfors shuddered, his shoulders twitching under the emotionless, heavy voice.

“How would I know that?”

“Meghna is out there right now, cleaning up the mess you’ve made. Thanks to you, the Southern Army has become untrustworthy, and she hasn’t been able to get a proper sleep for days to fill that void.”

“…So, it’s all a frame-up……!”

Galexentre, about to shout something with a sense of injustice, suddenly stopped as an overwhelming aura of killing intent seemed to pierce through his throat. The veteran general stood up, gripping Galexentre’s neck, and forcefully pulled him to his feet.

“Look out there, through that window.”

“…”

Beyond the window, the beach was visible. But unlike usual, what existed there was a massive wave, a tremendous force violating the land.

Facing the terrifying sight, as if the wave could hit any moment, Galexentre’s complexion turned pale.

“The… the wave is coming, so why aren’t you avoiding it and staying here…?”

“Meghna is at the forefront of that wave, confronting the monsters it brings and protecting the residents. Yet, your first thought is to flee and hide.”

“…”

“That is the difference between you and Meghna.”

Galexentre’s body stiffened. The veteran general, with a bitter smile, released Galexentre’s neck.

“In the past, you were a child who knew how to work hard as much as you were ambitious. But now, you are merely greedy, and you have failed to grow in any way.”

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Chapter 975

“In the past, you were a child who knew how to work hard as much as you were ambitious. But now, you are merely greedy, and you have failed to grow in any way.”

Galexentre’s lips quivered. After a moment of silence, he couldn’t hold back any longer and shouted.

“This is truly… truly too much, Master…! You have always favored Meghna and have been truly harsh to me. If only you had trusted me just once, this wouldn’t have happened!”

His eyes, bloodshot, were filled with more hatred, resentment, and jealousy than fear.

“Do you think you will be unaffected if I am captured, Master? No. Regardless of what anyone says, I am your disciple. It seems like you and Meghna are trying to pin all the blame on me and act innocent, but people won’t see it that way! My downfall will forever tarnish the reputation of the once-perfect Gino Bordelli!”

“I know.”

General Gino’s response was calm yet heavy and cold, enough to make even the shouting Galexentre falter.

“Your sin is also my sin for not raising you properly. I have no intention of shirking that responsibility. That’s precisely why I remain here.”

Galexentre’s eyebrows twitched momentarily.

“What…”

“Although we’ve caught those impersonating the Southern Army for a while now, including you, they’re not the only spies within our ranks. We

can’t leave such treacherous elements unchecked in a crisis that threatens the fate of the South.”

Galexentre suddenly felt a chilling sensation and looked around. He realized he had seen almost no one since being dragged from the prison to this place. Only he and the general were present in this space.

At first, he thought it was to interrogate him secretly, as a key military officer. After hearing about Meghna outside, he thought perhaps they were short-staffed due to natural disasters and monster threats.

But… was there another reason?

At that moment, an indistinct presence was felt near the room.

“They’ve finally been caught. The remaining sweet potato roots clinging to you.”

General Gino, as if waiting for this moment, let out a cold smile. His movement in rising from his seated position, hands on his sword sheath like a cane, was so slow and relaxed it seemed unreal.

Yet, that small movement felt overwhelmingly oppressive, crushing Galexentre’s breath.

“Gasp… Ugh… Ack!”

“Let’s see what the harvest brings.”

General Gino, slinging the sheath over his shoulder like a farming tool, walked out the door with a nonchalant attitude. As he did, dozens of assassins dressed in imperial army uniforms, eyes glinting, rushed in.

“Kill him!”

A smoke bomb exploded, blinding the view, and an unknown power surged. Realizing the assassins were not ordinary swordsmen but Awakeners, Gino Bordelli remained unfazed, standing still with his eyes closed.

A letter from Kishiar La Orr, recently received, came to his mind.

If a second hailstorm day descends upon the South, the remaining spies within the Southern Army will begin to stir. But I will not leave them to interfere with our plans. I intend to divert their attention towards a more enticing bait.

It was easier to filter out the recently turned spies. However, those treacherous forces that had long lurked within the Southern Army were not so easily caught, having blended in over time.

To distract these agents and lure them out despite the risk, a substantial bait was needed. Emperor Keilusa and Kishiar entrusted General Gino with this task.

General Gino, while pretending to focus on tracking down foreign spies masquerading as Southern Army soldiers, subtly let slip rumors about his declining health.

Swordmasters, as they age and their physical strength wanes, try not to overexert their aura, cautious of breaking their vessel. But Gino Bordelli had unreservedly demonstrated his power in front of all the Southerners during the hailstorm day, exterminating monsters, which lent credibility to the rumors of his deteriorating health.

When he acted as if he was trying to hide the rumors from spreading outside the army as much as possible, Galexentre and those around him began to pay attention to the general's every move, albeit with some skepticism.

Finally, when the time came, the general, who had been attracting their attention, arrested Galexentre and all his associates. However, "coincidentally," before the interrogation could begin in earnest, a disastrous wave and monsters struck, forcing Meghna and other troops to be sent out.

Of course, this was merely a ruse to leave the Southern Army's headquarters nearly empty, but the enemies wouldn't know that. Who

would have imagined that the Emperor and the Cavalry were already preparing for such a disaster?

Despite the disaster lasting all day, General Gino, not emerging to assist Meghna and remaining secluded, seemed to confirm the rumors for the traitors, who finally began to act.

Bait, by nature, is something that seems too delicious to resist despite its apparent danger.

To those wishing to bring down the Orr Empire, this opportunity to naturally eliminate a weakened yet spiritually respected figure of the entire empire must have seemed too tempting. Even if problems arose, they could blame everything on the captured Galexentre and escape.

But Gino Bordelli, even if unwell, was not an easy prey. If the enemies weren't fools, they would focus their efforts on capturing the old tiger.

And Kishiar, who had coolly predicted all this, writing it down in a letter like a strategy game's moves, left one last request to the General.

If all goes well and every bait is taken, you know what to do next. Make sure they can never interfere with us, unaware of where they fell for the bait.

Yes, that is what I shall do.

General Gino muttered, drawing the sword slung over his shoulder. Simultaneously, dozens of attacks rushing from the darkness were cleaved in half by his aura.

"Arghhh!"

Explosions and screams, lethal intents targeting the throat, and amidst it all, those quick enough to realize something was amiss and attempting to flee.

"Not a single one of you will leave here."

The murmuring of the aged swordsman's eyes shone like that of a hunter.

“Come, let this old man work hard to pay for his sins a little more!”

-

When the fourteenth wave first revealed itself, there was no one who didn’t instinctively feel terror.

After a whole day of battling, the calamity not only didn’t decrease but returned even larger than before. Who wouldn’t despair at that sight?

Yet, the dark blue wall of despair, as time passed, was now crumbling into chaos right before everyone’s eyes.

“There’s not much left now!”

“It’s almost low tide!”

Even the most mysteriously powerful waves, rising high, cannot completely escape the laws of nature. As low tide approached, the waves that had filled and surged over the land quickly lost strength, became sluggish, and began to recede.

Cracks appeared in what seemed like an insurmountable wall.

Everyone attacked until the end, shouting until their throats were raw, never giving up. The desperate appearance of those who stepped forward to protect and defend each other was strangely familiar, as if they had seen it somewhere before.

“…Yes. They resemble you.”

Yuder Aile, who heard Kishiar’s muttering as he sat on a high hill, turned his head and slightly frowned his brows as if he could not understand.

“Eh? What did you just say?”

Yuder, halfway reclining under a specially arranged tent at the edge of the hill overlooking the area below, was receiving treatment from Enon and Lusan. It was very difficult to hear the surrounding sounds properly due to

Enon, who, as if he had been waiting, spewed out a string of curses as soon as he saw Yuder’s condition.

Kishiar gazed fondly at Yuder’s fingers peeking out from the blanket wrapped around him, and smiled.

“No, it’s nothing.”

At that moment, the worst form of despair, made of water, completely collapsed and lost its strength before their eyes.

“The waves are receding!”

“Commander, they say the monsters have been mostly dealt with!”

Yuder, who was curious about what Kishiar had said, quickly turned his gaze toward the sea. The scenery of the sea, slowly settling and regaining its calmness, was slowly etched into his dark eyes.

‘…Now, the Great Southern Earthquake will not happen.’

He pondered over this surreal and heart-stirring realization.

Ah. Yuder took a deep breath, his eyes opening and closing. An unknown warmth surged, the sensation burning his throat, followed by a fierce urge to burst forth.

But after those feelings subsided, what lingered was the memory of a dark crack at the bottom of the distant, fog-covered sea, invisible to the naked eye.

Yuder recalled the crack he had faced, and perhaps the white-gloved hand that might have been within it.

That entity, who had led Yuder and shown him the things lurking beyond the crack, telling him to look at the ‘important thing,’ might it be watching the current situation from the darkness?

“…”

To escape from his thoughts, to which he could not find an answer, Yuder closed and opened his eyes once more. As he turned his head, he saw the faces of his colleagues running towards him, staggering but shouting with joy.

“Yuder!”

“Did we really do it?!”

Yes. ‘We’ did it.

Not I, not you, but we.

Yuder found Kishiar among those embracing him in joy, crying, or laughing. Their eyes met, and the corners of his lips rose softly in a smile he didn’t expect.

After such a long time, he finally began to understand what the scene he had always longed for might be….

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Chapter 976

The day after the Blue Wall of Despair collapsed, the aftermath was in full swing with the land still submerged, traces of destruction and collapse, and the disposal of monster corpses. However, people's expressions were not so gloomy.

"Did you hear? All those numerous carts are filled with monster corpses that the new swordmaster personally hunted and collected."

"A new swordmaster? Are you referring to His Grace, the Duke of Peletta?"

"No, I'm talking about his adjutant, Sir Nathan Zuckerman!"

Somewhere, people marveled at the achievements of the new swordmaster who left a name as intense as the Duke of Peletta.

"I heard a flying Cavalry member saved a child who secretly left the shelter and got lost, nearly dying. What was the name… Elp… kins?"

"That's Marin, the Awakener who created forests all over the South this time. Those forests played a big role in blocking the waves! It wasn't made for no reason!"

"I heard the Lord of Mclara is going to create a monument for Ever Beck, who protected the town. If that stingy person is willing to do that, she must have accomplished something truly remarkable."

"In Antakia, they decided to hold a three-day festival for Kurga Sing, the pride of the town who saved Tuban and Sluban. It turns out he's the son of my cousin's wife's sixth cousin or something!"

"What's that compared to this? Haven't you heard that the Bolunwald family in Ulan received a mountain of letters and gifts from noble lords? Gakane Bolunwald, a descendant of General Jureli Bolunwald, was in the Cavalry! It's truly astonishing!"

Somewhere, people proudly mentioned the names of Cavalry members.

Although the Cavalry members were the most frequently mentioned, the names of others, including the Imperial Army, mages, and priests, also gained considerable fame.

It was unexpected that the name of General Gino, the pride of the South, did not stand out noticeably this time, unlike on the day of hail. However, his direct disciple and adjutant, Meghna Kurlieva, accomplished many feats, so people were sufficiently happy and delighted. The achievements of a disciple are no different from those of the master, the old general. Meghna's name and background, which had not been very well-known until now, instantly gained attention and began to be recognized by the commoners as someone worthy of succeeding the old general.

However, the two names that heated people's hearts more than anyone else were:

"I heard that Yuder Aile, the hero of the West, entered the sea in the South this time and stayed underwater for more than a day, blocking the disaster with his bare body. I thought such stories only existed in legends, but it's true. I can't believe it!"

"What do you mean, the hero of the West? Now we should call him the hero of the South."

"And what about His Grace, the Duke of Peletta? The moment he held the Divine Sword and split the sea, everyone who saw it was reminded of His Majesty, the First Emperor."

"I heard he is so beautiful that he is called the incarnation of the Sun God. I don't understand how such bad rumors have been circulating about him until now!"

"I also found out this time that it was all because of the nobles who didn't properly follow His Majesty the Emperor."

The names of Yuder Aile and Kishiar La Orr created deep and vast ripples throughout the South. Even commoners, who were too busy making a living to care about who was above them, began to gradually take an interest in the conflict between the imperial family and the noble faction as they talked about their legendary achievements.

Even the southern nobles, who would have been displeased with such murmurs from the commoners on a normal day, did not show any such signs today. They, too, had vivid memories of gathering in the places where they had evacuated for two days, trembling in fear, and hearing the miraculous news of the Cavalry's endurance and accomplishments.

No matter how much they usually looked down on the Emperor and sympathized with the ideas of the noble faction, they could not ignore the memory of the enormous disaster they had directly witnessed. They began to change their minds little by little, realizing that the South was their foundation and that they could only be safe if the land and power of the South were intact.

"I really thought I was going to die yesterday. That huge wave that could be seen even from the villa where we evacuated… I had no idea where to run, and my mind went blank."

"According to the information from the informant in the Herne family, the reason the First Princess was able to handle the situation around here so well for the past two days was thanks to the close and continuous cooperation with the Cavalry."

"Now that the situation has been resolved, the First Princess will soon become the new Duchess. It is confirmed that the next owner of the South will turn to the Emperor's faction."

"To be honest, I would do the same. From the day of hail to this wave, the only ones who have supported the South in every way were the Cavalry, right? Those who acted as if they would rally the noble faction didn't even take a single step out of the capital or offer any plausible words. And what about the Diarca family, who completely withdrew from the South after the day of hail?"

The moment the Diarca family was mentioned, an unpleasant anger spread among the gathered southern nobles.

“Even after the passing of the previous Duke of Herne, the Diarca family only expressed superficial condolences and did not voluntarily step forward to offer help first.”

“Even what they sent was only to cover up the scandal of His Highness the Crown Prince, following the orders of the imperial family, wasn’t it?”

“Aha. I heard that too. He left the palace without doing what he was supposed to do, right?”

“They acted as if they had already ascended to the throne just by holding one Crown Prince, but isn’t this the result of boasting with an incompetent person?”

The sharp words directed at Diarca began to grow like a rolling snowball, turning into more specific hostility.

“Whenever it’s time to gather opinions to keep the imperial family in check, they only say that they are the same nobles and one of the four ducal families, but in reality, everyone knows how much Diarca and the other two ducal families have ignored Herne.”

“Still, didn’t the First Son of Tain come as a member of the Cavalry, and the current heir sent sincere support to the South several times after the day of hail? Unlike someone else. The First Son of Apeto must have been too preoccupied with his illness to take care of other places, and their Third Son directly ran around in the South as a member of the Cavalry, so they can’t be compared to those from Diarca.”

It was clear that the closed-off and cliquey nature of the South, which they already possessed, exploded in various aspects on this occasion. The fact that many of the stubborn and narrow-minded southern nobles expressed the following opinions proved it:

“I don’t particularly like the current Herne either, but ignoring Herne is no different from ignoring our entire South. Herne is the descendant of the noble bloodline that has taken the most difficult path to defend the Empire from the front line facing the desert!”

“Seeing the hidden power of the Emperor and the Duke of Peletta, I think the First Princess’s actions were smart. We can’t let Diarca easily take power! They will never stand up for Herne and the South!”

It had been a long-standing historical bad habit of the four ducal families to be busy keeping each other in check, except when they were hostile to the imperial family.

At this time, when the South’s antipathy toward Diarca had risen significantly after being surprised by the power of the imperial family and the Cavalry, which they had ignored until now, unfamiliar individuals arrived in Charloin, which was struggling due to a lack of personnel for the aftermath.

“…Who should we be inspected by to enter the gates of Charloin?”

“I apologize, but due to the aftermath of yesterday’s disaster, everyone is busy, so we won’t be able to properly conduct external inspections for a while. Please provide your name and affiliation and wait outside. We will verify and open the gate for you later.”

The unfamiliar individuals who arrived in front of Charloin were all on horseback and looked like precious family members at a glance. Upon hearing the soldier’s words guarding the city gate, they seemed surprised and briefly discussed among themselves before nodding solemnly and speaking.

“We have come by the order of Theorado van Tain, the Commander of the Imperial Knights. Our purpose is to assist Herne and the South in the name of the Imperial Knights. Please convey this message.”

These surprising visitors and their purpose were immediately conveyed to Myra El Herne, the First Princess of Herne, through the lord of Charloin.

“The Imperial Knights have come to help us? Is that true?”

“Yes.”

Myra’s face had relaxed with relief and joy after the nightmarish past two days. Despite being exhausted, she spoke with lively eyes and pondered.

“Well… It would have been better if they had come two days ago. But they probably didn’t come knowing this would happen, and we have successfully overcome the disaster, so it doesn’t matter. Since we need anyone’s help in the current situation, tell them they can enter if they can assist with the aftermath.”

“Understood.”

It was quite unexpected that the Imperial Knights had come all the way here to help Herne and the South. They do not usually leave the capital for trivial matters.

‘The current commander is from the Tain family. The current heir of Tain has shown a friendly attitude toward His Majesty the Emperor and us as well, so it is highly likely that this happened due to that influence.’

Well, it is a thankful thing for anyone to help. Currently, Charloin was quite chaotic, with most of the personnel, including the Cavalry, Imperial Army, priests, and general security guards, absent for recovery. At this time, they needed the help of people to fill the gaps to prevent crime from rampaging.

The faster the aftermath was handled, the sooner she could inherit the title and deal with the remaining postponed matters.

Myra thought so and inwardly felt grateful to the Emperor and the Tain family.

In fact, she never even imagined that the real reason the Imperial Knights moved was because of someone she had never thought of.

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Chapter 977

In the office of the Commander of the Imperial Knights in the Seventh Wall district of the capital, the current commander, Theorado Van Tain, was known for his obsession with swords. As befitting a place where he spent a long time, it was filled with glass cases storing his collected swords. It seemed to be a place made for swords rather than for humans.

Theorado sat among those swords and read the letter that had just arrived. It was none other than a report sent by the Imperial Knights dispatched to Charloin.

We have arrived in Charloin. Surprisingly, two days before our arrival, a tremendous disaster occurred in the entire southern sea, but the Cavalry successfully took the lead in handling it…

It was truly astonishing news.

The capital had not yet received even a hint of such an incident occurring in the south. A look of agitation appeared on Theorado's expressionless face.

The letter detailed, as much as possible, the new disaster in the south that they had seen and heard about, and the legendary stories of those who had run to overcome it. It was so surprising that one would doubt their eyes just by reading it, yet all these words were true. If he hadn't known that the person who wrote and sent this was a knight who was not very favorable towards the Cavalry and never boasted, with a serious personality, he would have considered it a lie.

The writer must have been so surprised that the handwriting, which should have been elegant as befitting a son of a prestigious noble family, was a mess, with the paper scratched by scribbled traces.

Anyway, we have decided to assist in the aftermath at the request of the lord of Charloin and the First Princess of Herne. Compared to the scale of the disaster, the extent of damage is miraculously small, but there seemed to be

a large vacancy in the personnel in charge of security and medical care. All the members are constantly amazed by the Commander's foresight in sending us here at such an appropriate time. Then, I will continue to report after starting the work.

The report spanning three pages ended. Theorado folded the letter back. After staring at it for a long time, a long sigh escaped from between his lips.

"…It's truly astonishing."

The Imperial Knights who went to Charloin were surprised by Theorado's foresight, but in fact, it was not something that had started with his complete will.

The person who first proposed all this came to Theorado's mind.

A few nights ago, Kiolle da Diarca, who had secretly climbed over the wall and entered this place.

"We need to send support to the south!"

In the office where he had returned after finishing sword training as usual, Kiolle was sitting with a very tense face. Naturally, since it was not a normal visit, his appearance was a complete mess. He was wearing casual clothes instead of a uniform, and on his feet, he was ridiculously wearing fluffy indoor slippers. His hair, which he always kept tied back, was also disheveled, making it hard to believe that he was the 'Sir Diarca' who always held his head high wherever he went.

Theorado, who was looking at the youngest son of the Diarca family, who started talking about his own business as soon as they met, turned his head without even sighing.

"I heard that you were not feeling well and were recuperating at home for a while, but I didn't know that the sick part was your head. I won't call anyone right away in consideration of our past relationship, so go back quietly."

It was an attitude closer to dealing with an annoying child who didn’t listen, rather than a subordinate knight. To be honest, Theorado had always thought of Kiolle that way. He was the young master of the Diarca family, not a person of the Imperial Knights.

Well, to be fair, Theorado Van Tain himself was half the same.

“Did you not hear what I just said? I said we need to send support to the south!”

Kiolle shouted urgently, waving his arms. He then said something, but he was so flustered that even a child just learning to speak would be better than him. However, after removing all that fluster and summarizing it, what he was trying to say was actually very simple.

“…So you’re saying that there is a high possibility of another disaster striking the south soon, so it would be good for our Imperial Knights to hurry and send support?”

“Yes. That’s exactly it.”

Kiolle’s face brightened. Theorado tilted his head and asked back.

“Why should we do that?”

“Pardon?”

“The Imperial Knights exist primarily to protect the Imperial Palace and the capital. Regardless of what happens in the south, there is no reason for us to take the lead. Moreover, His Majesty the Emperor has never given such an order, so there is even less need for us to do so. Besides, I heard that the recent disaster in the south is already being handled well. Where did you hear that a new disaster will occur? Did the Diarca family send you to pass the work onto us?”

Kiolle’s face turned pale. However, surprisingly, he did not get angry or stutter, but closed his lips tightly and then opened his mouth to answer very calmly.

“…No. This information is based on what I personally obtained from the Cavalry… However, Diarca, no. Duke Diarca has decided not to send support to the south… despite being informed of the information first.”

Kiolle, who closed his eyes tightly, took a few breaths and muttered.

“I think you know the reason without me having to say it, Commander. And that’s exactly why I… came here.”

“…You directly obtained information from the Cavalry? What relationship did you have with the Cavalry?”

Theorado had never heard of any circumstances in which Kiolle da Diarca was involved with the Cavalry. Kiolle shouted at Theorado, who was filled with questions, as if he was caught off guard.

“Is that important now?! The important thing is that Duke Diarca has decided that support is not necessary!”

“…”

“Why did you ask why the Imperial Knights should move? Have you forgotten what we, the Imperial Knights, swear when we join? Aren’t we different from ordinary knights?!”

The Imperial Knights usually protect the Emperor and the capital where the Emperor resides. However, in fact, they are also a special knightly order that can go anywhere to provide support if necessary, leaving the Imperial Palace and the capital.

This is because their parent organization, the First Emperor’s Guard, was separated into the Imperial Palace Knights and later renamed the Imperial Knights.

The Emperor is the same as the empire. The Imperial Knights protect the Emperor and the empire he rules.

Throughout their long history spanning a thousand years, the Imperial Knights have saved the empire in crisis many times by demonstrating the

mobility befitting an elite few who gathered only outstanding individuals. Thanks to the reputation of their senior knights, the current Imperial Knights have gained the authority to go anywhere in the empire to provide support even without the direct order of the Emperor. However, the current Imperial Knights do not find that authority very meaningful, contrary to their name. This is because the current Imperial Knights have become closer to a position of checking or being wary of each other with the Emperor, rather than being close to the Emperor.

Theorado also had never felt the need to use that authority, so since becoming the commander, he had sent the Imperial Knights out of the capital less than three times, excluding external training.

Therefore, the oath of the Imperial Knights that they swore upon joining had also been forgotten for a very long time in his mind.

As Theorado Van Tain frowned and closed his mouth, Kiolle continued to speak as if he had gained courage.

“I have been in the south all this time. In fact, I was there on the day called the Day of Hail. The Cavalry was convinced that what happened that day was not the end. If that’s true, shouldn’t we naturally send additional support? Regardless of personal thoughts about the Cavalry… anyway, isn’t the south also a part of the empire that we must protect?!”

‘Despite not revealing all these complicated situations to the outside… you already knew, guessed, and came here? You, Kiolle, who was once considered foolish?’

What on earth is he doing this for?

The first thing that came to Theorado’s mind was, of course, the fight for the title of the next Duke of Diarca and the Crown Prince.

‘Could it be…’

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Chapter 978

‘Could it be…?’

Outsiders who knew nothing thought that the succession of the Duke of Diarca had long been decided. It was because the eldest son, Kironne, had already built a far superior network compared to his brothers, using his noticeably older age as a weapon. However, Theorado, who was also from one of the four ducal families, knew very well that age and connections could not be the answer to securing the title.

The Duke of Diarca was a profoundly inscrutable man. Although he appeared to cherish his eldest son on the outside, the fact that he had never once clearly expressed his intention to make him the next successor was telling enough.

While Kironne seemed to not care about that fact on the surface, was that truly the case on the inside? And would the remaining brothers, who appeared to acknowledge and prostrate themselves before him on the surface, really be completely unaware of what that meant?

Theorado thought there was no way that could be the case.

The reason they were quiet was simply because they were keeping their mouths shut to avoid causing any disruption until Crown Prince Katchian became the Emperor, as the current Emperor’s health was rapidly deteriorating. The moment Katchian became the Emperor, and the moment Diarca became the undisputed supreme power in both name and reality, they would certainly not remain as docile as they were now.

However, that was only possible if the situation surrounding them maintained the same delicate balance as before.

On the one hand, the unexpected accidents and reckless actions of Crown Prince Katchian had recently disappointed his supporters.

On the other hand, the surprising and unstoppable growth of Duke Peletta and the Cavalry, who represented the Emperor's side, despite being thought to be on the verge of death.

And the rapid changes in the power structure occurring in the remaining three ducal families, excluding Diarca.

Things that were thought to never happen were happening.

It was undoubtedly clear that these sudden changes were progressing in a way that was endlessly unfavorable to the Crown Prince and extremely advantageous to the Emperor's faction.

Then, could it be that someone within Diarca was also thinking of riding on this change to overturn the seemingly predetermined outcome in their favor?

What if it was the youngest son, who had been known as the most foolish among the Duke of Diarca's sons and had never been a threat to anyone due to already having the profession of a knight, which kept him away from the center of power?

"Hmm…"

Recently, rumors had spread thickly that Kiolle da Diarca had repented and grown, becoming quite different from his previous self. Theorado had dismissed and ignored those words… but seeing Kiolle in front of him now, it seemed the rumors were not entirely false.

Unlike his foolish-looking eyes in the past, Kiolle da Diarca's eyes shone with a frightening intensity. They were the eyes of someone who possessed a clear will to achieve their goal but also realistically knew how difficult and challenging it would be.

In reality, Kiolle was merely squeezing out the last of his strength to say what he needed to say while being afraid of getting caught and scolded by his father, but to Theorado's eyes, that appearance seemed remarkably similar to his own father, the Duke of Diarca.

Come to think of it, he was famous for resembling his father's younger days the most among his siblings. It was hard to believe, but if it was true that he harbored the intentions Theorado suspected in that head of his…

Theorado looked at the anxious Kiolle and opened his mouth as if testing the waters.

"Actually, I was secretly preparing to send personnel connected to the Imperial Knights to the South soon, along with support from the Tain family. It wouldn't be bad to include the Imperial Knights in that as well. Did you perhaps already guess that I was thinking this way?"

At that, Kiolle's eyes widened slightly in surprise, and he smiled.

"You were already preparing, as expected of the Commander! …I may have come too late."

Too late? Upon hearing those innocent words, Theorado was convinced.

As he thought. Kiolle had already guessed everything before coming here.

To further confirm his suspicion, he decided to ask one more thing.

"Your current affiliation is not the Imperial Knights' headquarters but is in the process of being changed to a dispatched form at His Highness the Crown Prince's Bright Palace. Are you perhaps thinking of leaving that position after this period of recuperation ends?"

If Kiolle had truly come here without any ulterior motives, he would step down from his position as the Crown Prince's closest guard knight. If not…

"No."

Kiolle shook his head with a resolute expression Theorado had never seen before.

"Actually, I did consider that… but I don't think it's possible yet. There seems to be a lot to keep an eye on…"

It meant that he was the only one who knew the circumstances and condition of the Crown Prince before and after being brainwashed by the sage, so he needed to observe a little longer.

If Yuder had heard it, he might have thought Kiolle was quite useful for someone like him, but Theorado van Tain completely misunderstood and closed his eyes firmly.

“I raised a tiger cub crouching under my shadow…”

“Pardon?”

“…I understand your intention. You may leave now. Remember today’s conversation.”

“Then…”

“I will dispatch the Imperial Knights before the support I was preparing. I’ll have to inform His Majesty the Emperor’s side as well. However, if the information you shared today turns out to be false, you’ll have to take responsibility for the aftermath.”

“Don’t worry. That won’t happen!”

Kiolle was brimming with confidence. It was information from the Yuder Aile himself. He didn’t consider at all how Theorado would judge him based on his appearance.

“Kiolle. One last question.”

“Yes. What is it?”

“You said you were in the South all this time. Then, did you also personally see the new swordmasters who have only been known through rumors? How were they in your eyes?”

In fact, more than any complex political issue, what had captured Theorado’s attention the most these days was that very part. He couldn’t

deny that the news played a significant role in his decision to extend a friendly hand to the Emperor’s faction.

Receiving Theorado’s gaze, who hid his anxiously pounding heart behind an expressionless face, Kiolle’s expression changed. As if recalling something, he frowned, his face turning slightly pale, and he trembled before speaking with difficulty.

“…The rumors are true. Beyond that, I have nothing more to say. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t ask further.”

Unaware that his words further stimulated Theorado, Kiolle dragged his fluffy indoor shoes and left as if running away.

After that, as if Emperor Keilusa had been waiting for the right moment, the shocking news that he had appeared at the state affairs meeting alongside the Empress for the first time in several years began to sweep the entire capital in earnest. When the information spread that he had directly made a statement along the lines of “my body is now well,” there was no one who wasn’t shocked.

The Duke of Diarca and other noble faction figures were too focused on being alert to the Emperor to pay attention to trivial matters. Taking advantage of that gap, Theorado was able to easily and quickly send support personnel from the Imperial Knights to the South.

And today, he learned that everything Kiolle da Diarca had said was true.

The sudden and massive disaster that had apparently struck the South.

If it was true that the Cavalry and the Southern Army had succeeded in preventing it without significant damage, to what extent would the prestige of the recovered Emperor and Duke Peletta, who had even become a swordmaster, grow?

Kiolle da Diarca. How much did he know when he came to find Theorado that night? Was it really a coincidence that Emperor Keilusa began to move conspicuously as soon as he visited?

If the hand of the Cavalry and the Emperor’s faction, which was now stirring up Apeto, Tain, and even Herne, was secretly targeting the core of Diarca through the unexpected figure of Kiolle da Diarca, then what it ultimately aimed for was clearly…

Theorado van Tain sighed as he burned the folded report. As soon as he did so, someone knocked on the door and called for him.

“Commander. It’s a letter sent by His Grace the Duke of Tain.”

“Again?”

The content of the letters sent by the Duke of Tain from prison was always the same. A request to testify on his behalf. And the continuous demands for money and jewels for the ongoing trial. Usually, when making such requests, the one in need would yield, but the Duke of Tain still believed he was no different from before, using rude words to command as if it were natural. Of course, Theorado did not respond to them.

However, perhaps having tasted quite a bit of bitterness, this letter contained a considerable amount of begging and pleading amidst the rudeness.

The foolish gambler who didn’t even know how busy the capital was changing. People were no longer shocked by the fact that the Duke of Tain was standing trial and began to focus more on other matters, but he alone was unaware of how insignificant he had become.

If he had acted shrewdly to at least preserve his honor, he might have been able to rejoin noble society later. But now, he was no longer important to anyone. The children and judges of Tain House, whom the Duke had scorned, were using the trial to systematically obliterate him from society.

Was there really a need to continue watching prey that didn’t even realize it was being hunted until its death?

Theorado skimmed through the letter with an expressionless face and immediately put it down.

“I won’t send a reply. From now on, burn all letters sent from him without opening them.”

“Understood!”

Until now, he hadn’t completely rejected the letters sent by him due to the possibility of the unknown. But now, after hearing the new news from the South, there was no longer even a shred of reason to do so.

Theorado turned his body without giving the letter on the desk a second glance.

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Sunlight flickered over his closed eyes.

As soon as Yuder unknowingly frowned slightly, the light disappeared, shaded by something. Finding that even stranger, he opened his eyes, and the beautiful man who had been casting a shadow over his forehead by raising his hand smiled like a child caught playing a prank and greeted him with a sweet greeting.

“…Are you awake?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have any bad dreams?”

Yuder blinked a few times and shook his head.

“…I didn’t. Nothing at all.”

Only then did Kishiar withdraw his hand.

They were together in the Southern Branch’s Commander’s bedroom. However, unlike before, the bedroom no longer contained various items for the injured. Although the scent of medicine brought by Enon was unavoidable, everything else was so clean that it was hard to believe it was a bedroom after a huge battle, and the atmosphere was also bright.

‘…Perhaps I feel this way because the Great Southern Earthquake has ceased to exist.’

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Chapter 979

'...Perhaps I feel this way because the Great Southern Earthquake has ceased to exist.'

The voices of his colleagues who had hugged him, crying and laughing, echoed faintly in his head. An unfamiliar thrill pierced through his chest, then subsided. As Yuder closed his eyes, exhaling deeply, Kishiar lay beside him and laughed.

"It's really strange. It's only been a day since everything ended, yet the moment we entered the sea felt like it happened a very long time ago."

"..."

"Oh my. Was it just me?"

"I..."

Yuder recalled the memories of the deep, dark depths of the sea. At that time, the land felt distant and unfamiliar, but now, as Kishiar said, the memories of that time felt as hazy as if they were from a previous life. The difficult moments quickly disappeared, leaving only the joy after everything was over and a very slight bitterness that remained at the bottom, alone.

And on the other hand...

"...Truthfully, I sometimes wonder if I'll open my eyes and find myself back before everything was resolved, or still in the depths of the sea."

It felt real, but at the same time, it didn't. Yuder thought that he might feel that way even more because his body felt too fine after waking up.

'Come to think of it, even in my previous life, I never woke up feeling this fine and refreshed after a big battle.'

It was probably the first time that he had woken up after overcoming an urgent situation and didn't have urgent things to do, and it was also the first time that he didn't feel anxious about it and think that he should get up quickly. In the first place, it was rare for Yuder Aile to wake up with a fine body and continue lying in bed for no reason.

But now... it seemed okay to do that. Even if just for a very short while.

It was a really complicated and strange feeling that he couldn't express in words.

While Yuder was quietly blinking and thinking about the sensations he was feeling, Kishiar, who had been silent for a moment, suddenly sat up.

"Alright. If it doesn't feel real, I should help make it so, right?"

Wondering what he was trying to do, the man swiftly lifted Yuder up in his arms. It was a movement that was as light as carrying a child, despite lifting a tall adult man.

"...What are you trying to do? Aren't I heavy?"

"Hahaha. Not at all. Rather, you've become so light compared to two days ago that I don't feel good about it."

Kishiar laughed cheerfully and carried Yuder out of the bed.

In the past, Yuder would have been displeased or flustered and pushed him away, insisting on walking on his own feet. However, the current Yuder just stayed silent and let Kishiar do as he pleased.

There was no one in the commander's bedroom or the office outside anyway. It was because Enon had prescribed to Kishiar yesterday, after roughly completing emergency treatment at the port, 'Absolutely do not let him out of your sight for a while.'

Because Enon had said it as if he were angry, other people seemed to have taken it to mean that Yuder should be treated preciously in the most

precious place and be healed. However, only the parties involved knew the underlying meaning of those words.

It meant that to quickly recover both Yuder's soul and Kishiar's vessel, it was best for them to stick together anyway. Whether Enon liked it or not.

Of course, Yuder himself had no intention of rebelling against that prescription. Kishiar, who nodded with a smile, felt the same way.

Before leaving the port, Kishiar had announced that he would leave the aftermath to First Princess Myra's side and ordered everyone who had worked hard for two days to prioritize recovery and rest unconditionally. That naturally included himself and Yuder.

It was because of that the commander's office, which should have been the busiest after completing a big task, was so quiet.

As the man approached the curtained window and let out a small sigh, the cloth covering the outside gently parted to the sides without even touching a finger.

"How can you use your powers so soon?"

"It was less effort than lifting a fingernail, so let this much slide."

The man, who answered like a beast acting cute in response to Yuder's point, adjusted his hold on Yuder.

It was an angle where they could directly look outside the window.

'Does he want me to look outside? There's nothing there... There won't be anyone...'

Yuder sighed and lowered his gaze, then his eyes widened.

There was someone there.

So many people filled the front yard of the southern branch that it looked cramped.

Some were exercising while sweating despite being bandaged.

Some were sitting leisurely and having a pleasant conversation with their colleagues.

Some had spread out a spot where the sunlight shone well and were eating something ravenously.

Although it couldn't be heard from here, they were all laughing pleasantly and comfortably. It was a lively scene that made it hard to believe it was a winter afternoon. The warm air lingering there felt like spring. Yuder stared at it blankly for a long time.

Many of those faces had already disappeared long ago by this time in his previous life. They had either died, left the group, or were still living in hardship, unable to even join the group. Now they were all gathered in one place. With faces that didn't look difficult or painful at all.

However, that didn't mean nothing had happened. The solid camaraderie and connection unique to those who had endured a difficult path together until the end and remained in this place was clearly felt in their eyes. The fact that Yuder could recognize that meant he also shared something similar with them.

"..."

"Do you now somewhat realize what you have protected?"

Yuder looked at them for a long time before turning his head. As their gazes met, Kishiar tilted his head with a grin, as if he had been waiting. It was a mischievous expression that clearly showed he wanted to say, 'See. Wasn't I right?' The thin traces of wounds that had not yet disappeared on that face tugged at Yuder's heart.

Yuder firmly shook his head.

"Hm?"

"...No."

"It's not what I protected, it's what we protected."

And that 'we' included Yuder himself and the Kishiar in front of his eyes.

As if understanding the meaning, Kishiar blinked for a moment, then shook his head as if admitting defeat and kissed the side of Yuder's forehead.

"...Yeah. You're right. 'We' protected it."

"Yes."

As Yuder inwardly repeated those words, 'we,' the light that entered through the window gently reflected in his eyes.

The outside scene Kishiar showed had a great effect. Yuder no longer felt the strange feeling he had when he first woke up.

It was no exaggeration to say that after finishing a mountain-like meal that was piled up so high the tray couldn't be seen and taking the medicine Enon had sent, his energy overflowed. He clenched and unclenched his fists a few times to gauge his internal condition, and it seemed his strength had also recovered to some extent while he was asleep.

'I thought I wouldn't be able to use my strength properly for a while because I squeezed it out until the end... Is this fast recovery also due to the power of the Red Stone?'

"Now that you've finished your meal, it's time for dessert, right?"

Kishiar appeared again from somewhere with an incredibly fancy tray between the blazing magic stone fireplace. The sight of a huge cake, meticulously arranged in five tiers on a platter, with each layer filled with different varieties, was so grand it was almost overwhelming just to look at, and it was impossible to know when he had made and brought them.

"..."

"If you don't feel like having cake, there are cookies and bread too. You can say whatever you want and eat it right away."

"When did you even..."

"We didn't make these. They were all sent by the southern people as a token of gratitude. In fact, I heard they're still piling up and the kitchen is about to explode. At first, they were wary of us, but now, I hear there's a flood of letters insisting that we must never withdraw our Cavalry from here."

Kishiar laughed softly and elegantly poured tea, placing it in front of Yuder. Then, as if to show off, he drank the tea first and gracefully picked up a fork, cutting and swallowing the cake on top.

"It's delicious. I can tell how much sincerity the person who made it put into baking it."

Yuder stared at the southern-style baked cheesecake, then followed Kishiar and cut the same size, putting it in his mouth. The cake, which had honey drizzled on it, was fluffier than it looked and was very sweet.

Watching the man enjoying the cake alongside him felt, perhaps, even a bit sweeter.

Sensing Yuder's gaze, the man looked up, crinkling the corners of his eyes.

"Being alive is a wonderful thing. I had been thinking all day yesterday that I wanted to sit side by side with you like this and watch you eat cake, and now I've achieved that dream."

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Chapter 980

“Being alive is a wonderful thing. I had been thinking all day yesterday that I wanted to sit side by side with you like this and watch you eat cake, and now I’ve achieved that dream.”

For a moment, Yuder was at a loss for words, his chest tightening slightly, but he averted his gaze and answered as if it were nothing. “…You were thinking about that in the midst of everything?”

“What do you mean by ‘that’? What hope could be more wonderful than this?” Kishiar retorted confidently.

Yuder wanted to say that watching him eat was hardly worth mentioning, but he swallowed those words. It was absurd, but at the same time, he felt he understood the sentiment behind Kishiar’s thoughts.

He remembered how heavy everything felt when he only thought about fending off the impending disaster, but how light it became when he considered what he wanted to do after it was over. There was nothing grandiose about those desires.

It was Kishiar who had taught him that. He said that the desire to change the past and the desire to see an unknown future could both serve as nourishment for living in the present, but the latter would be more enjoyable. Even those light-hearted words were, in the end, a practice of that sentiment.

Who in the world would know that the simple wish to sit side by side and eat cake, which was nothing remarkable, was such a precious hope for the man who had parted the sea and led everyone while displaying an aura that would go down in history? Who other than Yuder Aile would know that Kishiar La Orr was that kind of person…

Yuder pressed his lips together tightly before continuing. “Still, you couldn’t have been thinking about that even while underwater, right?”

“Why do you think not? The phrase ‘all day yesterday’ naturally includes that place too.”

Yuder’s eyes narrowed at the confident reply. “Commander, you really are…”

“Even though I may look a bit handsome and put-together on the outside, the truth is I’m a fool who can’t even distinguish between public and private matters. It’s hardly a new revelation.”

“That’s not what I was going to say.”

At that, Kishiar’s eyes widened before his eyelashes fluttered pitifully. “Oh? Are you saying I’m not handsome? You used to think my face was really handsome before.”

“How did the conversation turn in that direction? Don’t twist it in a strange way. What I denied was the latter part of your statement.”

“So even if I look like a mess now, you still think I’m handsome?”

“…”

Now it seemed that this was what he really wanted to say. Yuder’s gaze swept over Kishiar’s face once more, taking in the countless scars left on his skin as if cut by thin blades.

Although far less severe than the eye injury he had to hide for a while after the day of hail, they were still wounds nonetheless. His face was mottled all over, far from his usual immaculate appearance.

‘It can’t be helped. Even with divine power, he can’t heal himself, and Lusan is currently recovering from depleted divine power at a nearby temple…’

The divine power Lusan had poured into them with his last strength yesterday was almost entirely consumed in healing their internal injuries rather than external ones. It was a natural choice, as it was difficult to simultaneously heal both external and internal injuries for two people when

it was challenging for even one. Kishiar had even requested that Lusan prioritize healing Yuder's arm injury first, postponing his own turn, claiming his external wounds weren't deep. He had handed over any remaining usable divine power to other priests for treating the more seriously injured.

Thus, what remained were the current scars. Knowing this better than anyone, how could he possibly think of them as a mess?

In fact, those wounds were minor enough to heal without scarring if treated properly with medicine, and they both knew Lusan would fix them in a day or two. It was a joke made with that understanding. However, there were times when, even knowing this, one couldn't help but wonder if there was genuine sentiment hidden beneath the surface.

Yuder stared directly into the red eyes gazing at him and defiantly removed his glove, reaching out his hand. As his fingertips touched the scarred cheek, Kishiar's eyelids twitched momentarily. Yuder took a moment to ensure his rough fingertips weren't causing Kishiar pain before applying more pressure, gently caressing his cheek as he spoke.

"I know what these scars were gained in exchange for. So rather than feeling the opposite, I would express my respect."

"…"

"And even if these scars had appeared for no reason… I wouldn't mind. Regardless of the fact that I always find you handsome, if I had only been captivated by that, we could never have had the relationship we do now."

It was true that Yuder was often distracted by Kishiar's beauty, but those words held not a single shred of falsehood. His face was merely one part of what constituted the existence known as Kishiar La Orr. A part was just a part; it could never be the whole.

Yuder had only been able to truly believe in and look straight at Kishiar when he saw within his beautiful, smiling face the things he had never known in his previous life.

Whether he had scars or not, whether one eye was visible or not, even if only his hands remained without a body, Kishiar was Kishiar.

Yuder's thumb traced the end of a long, thin scar. He moved his gaze along that path without blinking, as if trying to memorize every sensation that touched his fingertips.

"I thought you would tell me to take a good look while you have the handsome appearance of being scarred, as it won't last long for the Commander I know… But I didn't realize you lacked confidence like this."

The man, who had been listening to Yuder's words as if entranced, finally blinked as if awakening. "Is that… how it is?"

"Isn't it?"

After a moment, Kishiar lowered his head and burst into laughter. "…Yes. Everything you said is true."

His flushed cheeks, surprisingly vibrant, sparkled like light beneath his red eyes. "I was so blinded by mischief and greed that I momentarily made a statement lacking confidence. I will reflect deeply on it, so will you accept my apology?"

"Of course."

"How merciful of you."

Yuder Aile and mercy. If anyone had heard, they might have doubted if there could be a more mismatched combination of words. But even if someone knew, what did it matter? The opinions of others were unimportant. The only thing that mattered to Yuder was the smile of the person in front of him right now.

The man, who had been laughing for a long time, turned his head towards Yuder's hand on his cheek as if unable to contain his surging emotions and kissed it. A series of pecking kisses followed, falling on Yuder's fingertips, the back of his hand, and all the way to his wrist.

One might expect him to find the bare hand, still covered in a messy web of reddish tendons from exerting immense strength, repulsive, but he showed no sign of minding at all.

‘The one who should be called a mess is actually me.’

In fact, Kishiar himself had never once shown any concern for Yuder’s wounds or unsightly appearance. And yet he worried about how he himself would appear in Yuder’s eyes. That aspect rarely made Yuder realize that even Kishiar La Orr was still a young man.

To be precise, a young man in love.

That young man kissed Yuder’s wrist, closed his eyes, and whispered, “…I must confess anew that I, too, have always felt reverence before the scars left on this hand. So I hope you won’t worry about entrusting your bare hands to me. Because there are no hands more beautiful to me than these.”

He already knew that Yuder was being cautious every time he tried to touch with his rough and unsightly bare hands.

How could one possibly restrain the urge to pounce when faced with that expression?

Yuder pulled his hand away just before Kishiar’s lips touched it again.

And he leaned in deeply to kiss the man who had raised his head.

“…”

In an instant, the countless emotions that had been suppressed over and over during the short yet long two days of going back and forth between life and death surged up, making his head feel hot.

At that moment, in a different sense than when he had looked out the window earlier, Yuder felt astonishingly certain that he had prevented the disaster and was definitely alive here.

‘Ah…’

Swallowing the poignant thrill running down the back of his neck, he looked straight into the eyes located closest to him. He felt truly fortunate that those eyes were safe, staying by his side without falling asleep like before.

Yuder, without taking his gaze off the red eyes, pointedly set down the fork he had been holding. The sound of the bowl and metal colliding rang out roughly, but no one looked in that direction.

"…I think I'm done eating cake for now."

The declaration was short and clear.

"Yes."

The man, who would normally ask once more if it was alright or playfully add another word, did not do so this time. Instead, what approached were lips and hands. Yuder readily welcomed the yearning of the man who kissed him again while pulling him up by the waist.

They returned to the bed they had left not long ago, heedless of the sound it made as it struggled to bear the weight of two people. It was closer to collapsing in a tangle than lying down. The thin bed curtain for blocking out sunlight, caught on their haphazardly flailing feet, was dislodged from its original position and half-covered the outside, and the bedding was distorted in an unkempt manner.

Yuder lay diagonally in that space and embraced Kishiar. He wrapped his arms around his shoulders and his legs around his waist, leaving no gap as he absorbed the boiling heat with his entire body.

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Chapter 981

Yuder recalled the intimate moments he shared with Kishiar before heading out to sea. Though only a few days had passed, everything felt different between then and now.

Back then, they were facing a disaster with uncertain outcomes. It was a time when they learned new facts about the connection between them, and Yuder had to consider their first connection from his previous life, which he had deemed unnecessary to discuss in detail. It was a headache in many ways.

However, it was precisely because of such times that Yuder realized anew that he was the only one who could protect Kishiar, including all the emotions he concealed. Any pain seemed meaningless compared to that truth, which was almost like a law.

So, the ecstasy they experienced then was like Yuder grabbing Kishiar, who was trying to pull away, lifting him into his arms, and embracing him as if sinking. He tried to reveal everything within himself while holding the one who had protected him until now. Putting aside all shame and wringing out all the moisture in his body, he greedily indulged in the moment, knowing he might never return if things went wrong.

Perhaps the reason nothing felt unfamiliar when they sank endlessly into the sea together, holding hands, was that he had experienced the same sensation countless times when their bodies overlapped that day.

But now, unlike then, they had succeeded in changing the future once again, and as a reward, they gained leisure and peace. Therefore, their current lovemaking was nothing more than a process of reaffirming their victory. In other words, it was a sharing of joy that they had overcome countless life-threatening moments and finally won. A confirmation of reality. A sharing of the exhausting moments they couldn’t tell anyone about. And lastly, it was a consolation.

“Ugh, hah. Uh. Ah…… Ah.”

The connection that filled his belly moved endlessly like waves surging and receding. Each time, the sensation of his insides moving like sand swept by the waves, contracting and clinging madly, seemed to burn his brain. Yuder choked on the pleasure it gave him, moaning and constantly moving along the wounds left on the man’s body.

When Yuder’s body overlapped with Kishiar’s, he sometimes felt like he was standing at a crossroads. One was a purely carnal act, immersed in lust without anything else intervening. The other was an act of sharing and swallowing numerous emotions and thoughts while immersed in them. Originally, he thought there was no meaning in the former kind of intercourse, but after his heat, he realized it wasn’t bad either and often deliberately emptied his mind to focus solely on the pleasure itself.

However, this time was a lovemaking that perfectly belonged to the second path.

No matter where he touched with his hands - cheeks, forehead, shoulders, back, thighs - he could feel the thin ridges and scabs, tickling his skin. As he parted his wet lips to cover and suck on the wound on Kishiar’s shoulder, the taut muscles tensed even more, and elastic breaths flowed out rapidly. At the same time, what had penetrated deeper and softer than before thrust powerfully to the end of his belly.

“Ah…!”

As Yuder threw his head back, Kishiar’s fingers supported his neck, wrapping around it to prevent it from bending. The breath licking the pulse below his ear, damp with heat, should have been messy, but to Yuder, it felt like a priest praying while gazing at the altar.

Like shapeless waves, they too continued to change everything every time they blinked, without any fixed posture. What had been connected face to face was reversed in the next moment to an embracing posture. Then Kishiar would be pushed back and lie down with Yuder on top of him,

thrusting his hips, and then… no one knew. Now, even such postures seemed to have no meaning.

Yuder had lost count of how many times he had climaxed. Each time his stretched opening clung and detached, the sticky, transparent fluid that had seeped from inside splashed and made a sound. Yuder gritted his teeth at the sensation of another wave of pleasure, arching his back and moaning long as the feeling of his thighs tightening. Kishiar instantly sucked in that honest sound, as if he couldn’t bear the pleasant feeling.

Haa. As if constantly trying to confirm that they were breathing and alive, their hands and lips moved back and forth repeatedly. Even though they were gasping for breath more than when they were submerged deep in the sea, that movement that didn’t stop the confirmation reminded Yuder of the word persistence rather than hunger or thirst.

At the last moment, Yuder released his scent for Kishiar. The scent that had already naturally flowed out enveloped Kishiar more thickly.

Kishiar’s red eyes, which willingly accepted it and tried to embrace Yuder by releasing his own scent in return, were so dark they almost looked black. Kissing the trembling golden eyelashes, Yuder stared at the fantastical sight of a pile of golden threads connected between them, floating.

‘Imprint…’

Behind Kishiar’s back, whom he held in his arms, the threads undulated like high waves. Yuder felt the indescribably deep emotions and vivid pleasure Kishiar experienced flowing into him like a waterfall through them.

The emotions that poured in like water engraved many things anew on Yuder’s empty interior, like a sandy beach, and drained away. Water may seem too weak to engrave anything because it has no fixed form. However, water is also something that can eventually pierce a hole even in a huge rock if it strikes repeatedly countless times.

So, wasn’t it an accurate expression for Kishiar to call the moment when formless emotions like water overlapped and left marks countless times an

imprint?

Thinking so, Yuder closed his trembling eyes in the face of a climax that burned his whole body like fire.

Through his closed eyes, the sea, cold and dark like death, completely flowed out…

Exactly two days. They spent time in the Commander’s bedroom without anyone’s interference until Lusan’s condition improved and he returned to the Cavalry.

Externally, it was a period for recovery, not an official vacation, but what they did was almost the same as the vacation they had after completing all the missions in the West before.

Yuder lay on the bed or on top of Kishiar’s body, wearing no clothes or roughly dressed, and ate the food Kishiar fed him. Kishiar also spent time holding Yuder, doing nothing, without a trace of his usual attitude of living a day as busy as others’ several days.

Even then, books and swords couldn’t come between them. Yuder gradually got used to falling asleep and waking up lying on top of Kishiar. He didn’t mind getting aroused by the gentle caresses on his exposed back and thighs while he slept. Sometimes, even in that state, they had deep conversations about what had happened in the South.

The Cavalry’s enthusiastic opponents they encountered as soon as they arrived in the South, the illegal fighting ring, the sudden hail day, and the terribly high waves and anomalous cracks. There were many things they had experienced. But Yuder didn’t know he had so much to say about them.

Until now, he had been busy and had no time to properly reflect on what had happened, but talking about it retrospectively just because he wanted to, without worrying about any aftermath, gave him a rather new feeling.

It was completely different from reports or discussions. He spoke all the topics as they came to mind, sometimes honestly regretting the

shortcomings or talking again about the people he had met someday.

When Yuder confessed about Elpkins' previous life, Kishiar honestly said he was glad. When Yuder was concerned about the inconvenience Kishiar must have experienced while being in the water for a long time, Yuder pondered and listed one by one the various and numerous ways he could utilize his abilities.

Sometimes they laughed while talking about the absurd guys they encountered at the illegal fighting ring, and while newly regretting the lacking parts of what they had done on the day of the hail, they suddenly gave cold evaluations to the deceased Duke Herne.

In other words, it was a chat that would be had at a tavern or such.

"…I thought there was nothing good about looking back, but it's strange."

"But doesn't it feel refreshing to talk about it?"

Yuder was silent for a moment and then nodded.

"Yes. …I think so."

"It's good to have someone to talk to about anything. I'm even more glad that I can be one of them for you."

"Who else would I talk to about this besides you, Commander?"

"Oh my. The other members would be incredibly disappointed if they heard this."

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Chapter 982

“Oh my. The other members would be incredibly disappointed if they heard this,” Kishiar said with a laugh. Each time he laughed, a soft vibration rippled through the skin layered over his body. Yuder thought he had seen Kishiar’s laughter enough times to etch it behind his eyelids, but feeling it through touch felt different.

How should he put it? It was as if Yuder’s own body, despite not laughing, shook in unison with Kishiar’s laughter, as if laughing along.

“You should share the conversations you had with me with them sometime. I guarantee it will be a very enjoyable time.”

“…”

“Of course, we should exclude the previous game. But there will still be plenty to talk about, so it should be fine.”

Yuder pondered for a moment before nodding slightly.

“…I understand.”

“If possible, before leaving the south. I recommend booking a nice tavern or restaurant and having a proper conversation in a good atmosphere.”

Even though he wasn’t the one planning to have the conversation, Kishiar excitedly added a new suggestion.

‘To that extent?…’

If it was peculiar, should he call it peculiar? Kishiar really enjoyed seeing Yuder getting along well with those around him.

As Kishiar listed off the names of various famous restaurants in Charloin, which Yuder had no idea when he had collected, Yuder abruptly asked, “If

you’re so looking forward to chatting, why don’t you join us, Commander?”

“Unfortunately, that won’t work. If I join, everyone will be too nervous to enjoy themselves.”

“Then, aside from me, who else can you share this experience with, Commander?”

Kishiar blinked without responding for a moment. A different smile than before appeared on the face of the man who had been looking at Yuder in surprise.

“Is that… you worrying about me?”

“…”

Yuder Aile also believed he understood well what it meant to be in a higher position, based on his experience as the Cavalry Commander in his previous life. The moment one took on a position of responsibility, there was no one left to stand shoulder to shoulder with. It meant there was no one to confide in, no one to comfortably share thoughts and jokes with.

As many things changed from his previous life, Yuder now had people he could have such conversations with. But what about Kishiar La Orr? Thinking about someone who enjoyed trivial conversations so much being left alone didn’t sit well with him.

If possible, Yuder wanted to see Kishiar always living comfortably and not feeling lonely, even when Yuder wasn’t around.

‘…Is that so? Could it be that this is why he keeps encouraging me to mingle with others?’

As Yuder gained a new understanding of the man’s behavior that had been difficult to comprehend, Kishiar replied in an extremely delighted voice.

“You don’t need to worry. I have Nathan, Hellem, and Mick who came all the way here, don’t I? Besides them, there are quite a few friends here and

there who, although they don’t know I’m the Duke of Peletta, have told me I’m a pretty good friend apart from that. Of course, I can’t tell them everything, but just sharing a moment with them can be enjoyable enough.”

Hearing this, it seemed Kishiar had built quite a large network of acquaintances from long ago while wearing a magic tool that concealed his face.

“When did you make such friends?”

“While trying to manage the empty Peletta, I ended up making many friends.”

Kishiar’s eyes drifted into the air for a moment, as if reaching into the distant past.

“Even someone like me needed money to take care of those who believed in and followed a new lord, and the best way to make money was through trade, right? Mick was actually one of the people I befriended that way.”

“So you didn’t reveal your identity as the Duke of Peletta from the beginning when building a friendship with the head of a trading company.”

“When I first met Mick, he was the son of a small merchant family who was remarkably good at business despite dealing with the few goods that came from a barren place like Peletta. He said his dream was to save money, become independent, and own a small general store.”

Yuder listened to Mick’s life story, which Kishiar shared, with considerable interest. The story of how Mick took revenge on the family members who had envied him, kicked him out of the company, and tried to kill him, and in the process, joined hands with Kishiar who saved his life and officially grew the Shuden Company, was almost like a novel. Especially the part where, despite Kishiar’s identity being accidentally revealed, Mick accepted everything and even knelt down, pledging loyalty and eternal cooperation, was enough to elicit admiration.

After hearing it, Yuder thought he could understand the root of Mick's deep loyalty to Kishiar. When he first met Mick in the West before, Kishiar had only mentioned that he happened to help him during the early days of the Shuden Company, but this went beyond simply providing help.

Indeed, it was no wonder Mick had such loyalty that he would enter the deep sea without question and risk his life to use his power.

'And also why he dislikes being called by his family name even while running a company with the same name as his family.'

If it was before the Shuden Company officially expanded its influence, how old would Kishiar have been then? Although uncertain, he must have been incomparably younger than he was now.

The story of the young Duke of Peletta in his boyhood, which Yuder had briefly heard from Hellem, crossed his mind. Not much different from the youthful appearance in the portrait he had seen at the Imperial Palace, did he hide himself and do so much to take care of his territory?

While holding the secret that he had a precarious vessel and that he could die at any moment.

"Was Mick's story quite interesting? You seem deep in thought after hearing it."

"It was a story I didn't know before."

Yuder answered, erasing his thoughts.

"If you're curious about the people around me, feel free to ask anytime. They would all be fine with letting you know this much."

"No. I…"

Yuder hesitated for a moment before opening his mouth.

"…Rather than about those around you, I was thinking about you, Commander, at the time you met them."

“About me?”

Kishiar, who questioned back as if it was unexpected, smiled brightly.

“My, my. Today, I feel like I’m continuously receiving gifts. Hearing such pleasant words, it’s not you who’s having trouble feeling the reality, but me.”

Yuder had learned a lot about this man, but that didn’t mean he knew everything. Since he had come to desire everything about him, naturally he was curious.

Kishiar, who had been laughing for a while, embraced Yuder. The man, who kissed Yuder’s ear, whispered softly and secretively.

“Originally, I had planned to return straight to the capital after this matter was over, without visiting the northern branch. Remember?”

“Yes.”

They had spent too much time in the south, so the second batch recruitment of the Cavalry members in the north had already been completed. There was no time or reason to visit that branch, so they had decided to return to the headquarters in the capital and meet the new Cavalry members from all branches at once.

They had to report to the Emperor and prepare for the rapidly changing situations, so that was the best option in many ways.

“…But after meeting with His Majesty the Emperor, I should be able to take a few days off. At that time, would you like to visit Peletta with me?”

Yuder blinked at the unexpected suggestion.

“I want to keep my word that I would show you the northern sea for comparison after seeing the southern sea. Plus, if you go there, you’ll be able to directly see the parts you were curious about regarding me. But if you don’t want to go right away…”

Perhaps knowing when Yuder had visited Peletta in his previous life, Yuder firmly answered before the last words that Kishiar was about to utter were finished.

“I’ll go. I definitely want to go. And…….”

“And?”

The man asked, gently narrowing his eyes with joy. Yuder closed his mouth, pondered, and then spoke.

“…I’m thinking of stopping by the house where I originally lived and finishing the cleanup I haven’t been able to do… If it’s alright with you, Commander, I’d like you to come with me.”

No one had visited Yuder’s house in the mountain valley since his grandfather died. In terms of time, it had been neglected for about a year since joining the Cavalry, but for Yuder, it felt like a place he hadn’t visited since his previous life. The thought of bringing someone else to that place, where even the memories had faded, was truly unfamiliar, even though he had said it himself.

However, he didn’t want to take back those words.

Because the man, who had always said he was curious about Yuder, was now shining with joy, as if he had received the best gift ever, upon hearing those words.

“…Of course. If you grant me such an honor, anytime.”

“It probably won’t be an honor. It was a very humble place, and honestly, I can’t clearly remember the location now. We might get lost and fail to find it.”

“Even that is an honor.”

Ah. The man, who uttered a word similar to admiration, buried his face in the chest he was embracing.

“…Now I feel like I can truly listen without any lingering reservations. All the things you were going to say before we set off to the sea.”

Yuder embraced the golden hair that tickled his chest. Two hearts beat at a similar pace.

He could tell what Kishiar said he would be able to hear, even without being told.

The story that Kishiar had said he would listen to that day, but in fact, simultaneously hoped not to hear.

The words that even Yuder himself didn’t particularly want to bring up.

And the dream of the white-gloved hand in the final crack that he couldn’t tell due to missing the timing because of the disaster.

Yes. Yuder also felt like he could now speak of everything much more easily.

3

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Chapter 983

A ceramic teapot floated in the air without a single touch, steaming as it poured warm milk. Two cups, enveloped by an invisible force, flew following Kishiar's gaze and settled into each of their arms.

Yuder looked down at the white cup in his hand.

Previously, when he first confessed about the 'previous game,' they had faced each other and played a strategy game in the Commander's office. Later, when he talked about the day he killed Kishiar, they had also faced each other with a similar feeling.

But now, they were sitting side by side on the bed, leaning their backs against it, each wearing only a thin piece of clothing. Through the drawn bed curtains, the winter sky of the south could be seen in the distance outside the window, and their stretched out bare feet touching each other looked too peaceful yet slightly obscene.

Having a completely opposite conversation in this atmosphere felt a bit strange, but not bad. The warmth spread as he swallowed a sip of milk down his esophagus. As Yuder exhaled softly, Kishiar, who had been waiting without urging, moved his foot and playfully rubbed Yuder's toes on the top of his foot.

"…"

Yuder looked into his eyes, faintly lifting the corners of his lips, and finally opened his mouth.

"The memory of the first connection is not very clear to me either. It wasn't as beautiful as… what exists between us now. At that time, I was intoxicated and serving as the Deputy Commander, reporting in the Commander's office. And then… an unexpected event occurred."

Yuder paused for a moment to moisten his lips with another sip before continuing without any hesitation.

“That’s when I suddenly had my second gender manifestation. You must have seen how I experienced the manifestation during the Imperial Palace’s Harvest Festival, so I think you can imagine what it was like.”

If the scent had been faint like Pruelle’s recent manifestation and only other omega Awakeners or non-manifested second genders were around, there might have been no problem. If someone like Nathan Zuckerman, a non-Awakener and a swordmaster who was not affected by the scent at all and had strong power, had been there, the accident might have been prevented early on.

However, Yuder’s manifestation occurred in the form of an explosively strong scent flowing out, and even coincided with a heat cycle. In the blink of an eye, the heat that soared to the top of his head swallowed everything, and only Kishiar, whose vessel was already broken, and Yuder, who couldn’t even recognize what was happening to him, were left in the Commander’s office. And then… it was the end.

“Commander, you were swept away by my manifestation. It took about a week for the manifestation to be completely finished and the heat to end, and after that, I began to feel the ‘connection.’”

Yuder chose words to describe the connection he felt at that time in the silence.

“It was… never as beautiful and soft as the thread we are looking at now.”

As Yuder twitched his toes, the shimmering golden threads seemed to flutter and fly as if they had a form of their own.

“I think it was closer to a sensation based on the memories I have left. After that day, sensations and emotions that were not mine kept coming uninvited without any rules. It might be similar to say that it was like the things that had made up me until then were shattered and then stitched back together

like a patchwork with something else mixed in. Anyway, whenever I felt it, of course… I wasn't very happy."

Saying he wasn't happy was actually an understatement. It was a feeling as if all the surprises and negativity one could feel in life were gathered and lumped together.

"It seems quite different from the emotions we convey to each other now."

The man resting his head on Yuder's shoulder muttered quietly.

"Honestly… yes. It was."

In fact, the pain Yuder experienced after the manifestation was not only the sensations transmitted from the connection with Kishiar. Whether it was the aftermath of lying around in a daze for days after the second gender manifestation, or the aftershock of the connection, there was a throbbing pain that lasted for a very long time, as if an invisible but definitely existing wound was healing.

Many Awakeners are often greatly shocked when they realize they have awakened and are no longer ordinary humans. But Yuder Aile had never been very shocked when he became an Awakener.

However, the second gender manifestation was different. The moment the second gender manifested and opened its eyes, the world in which Yuder Aile had lived was turned upside down much more than when he went from a non-Awakener to an Awakener. Yuder thought that perhaps the shock of awakening that other Awakeners had felt came to him during the second gender manifestation.

But the pain transmitted from Kishiar every time they faced each other was incomparably greater than the invisible pain he felt as a result.

'Now that I think about it, I might have felt it more strongly because I had never experienced that level of pain in my life until then.'

Yuder himself was already gripped by tremendous confusion and horror, but what came from the other side was no less, if not more, than that. Even though he thought it was mostly his fault for manifesting there, whenever Yuder felt that pain that made his whole body feel like it was being torn apart, he gritted his teeth and swallowed all sorts of thoughts.

What was so terrible about being unfortunately tied to a commoner that he was in so much pain every time he saw him that he was about to die?

If he wanted, he could just forget it as a one-night fling and move on quickly, so what was bothering him so much that he was making such a fuss?

Of course, he was able to think that way because he knew nothing about Kishiar at the time. He didn't know what kind of person he was, what his situation was like, or even the fact that he was already heading towards the day of his death in the midst of terrible pain.

In fact, even if he had known to some extent, he wasn't sure if he would have thought differently.

Yuder spoke all those things slowly, but without omitting anything.

"…Even without any guidance, I could somehow instinctively know that these sensations weren't mine but being transmitted from someone. Commander, you were the same. That was the 'first' connection I recognized."

After saying that, Yuder looked straight into Kishiar's eyes. The first connection was no longer such a painful memory for Yuder. What mattered was what came next.

"At that time, I… received a promise. Commander, you told me that you would definitely find out the nature of that strange phenomenon. But until I went to Peletta, it didn't seem like you were doing anything to solve the problem."

As he spoke, memories that had been buried for a long time seemed to spring up from here and there.

‘Yes, I…’

Yuder thought Kishiar would have forgotten about that promise. After all, as Kishiar quit being the Commander of the Cavalry and headed to Peletta, he hardly had to feel the pain he used to feel whenever he met Yuder. Even that faded away when Yuder attempted to talk to him about the rumors of rebellion, and the sense of ‘connection’ became infinitely faint.

Faded things are quickly erased from memory as well. Yuder also tried to forget all the conversations and promises as Kishiar did. The ‘connection’ that no one would understand even if explained was not important at all.

Because he tried to believe so.

“But it seems it wasn’t the case after all.”

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Chapter 984

“But it seems it wasn’t the case after all.”

To explain why, he must first confess something else.

Yuder’s fingers tightened slightly around the glass of milk as he opened his mouth to speak. “…Actually, when I first ‘returned’ here, I had forgotten a considerable amount of what had happened in the previous game that I’ve been telling you about. At first, I thought it wasn’t that important, so I forgot about it…”

He had thought it wasn’t a problem because it didn’t interfere with his life and there was no inconvenience in using his abilities and acting as the Commander of the Cavalry. The past was always a shameful scandal and a red label for Yudrain Aile, and it was more comfortable not to remember it.

How important could one person be whom he had only met for less than two years in his life? Rather than worrying about that, it was much more useful to dig into the memories of the disaster that he had failed to solve. He thought Kishiar was just someone who had to stay alive to avoid going down the same path as in his previous life.

How long did it take him to realize that wasn’t the case?

“From a certain day, memories that I didn’t know or thought I had forgotten started to appear abruptly through dreams after coming here. It took a considerable amount of time to acknowledge that they weren’t just simple nightmares or dreams without substance, but things that had really happened and facts that I didn’t know.”

“…”

“Most of those dreams… were focused on the conversation we had on the last day when I killed you in the previous game.”

Yuder spoke clearly without averting his eyes. When he first said that he had killed Kishiar, it felt so difficult, but now he could say it with a much calmer heart.

It was probably because the man in front of him and the hand in the white glove had changed Yuder to be able to do so.

“When I first returned here, I thought that I hadn’t had any conversation on that last day and had simply finished what I had to do and escaped. When something I couldn’t remember appeared in a dream in such a situation, I was confused for quite a long time about how much to believe in a situation where there was no evidence left.”

That he had a conversation with his assassination target. Not just a word or two, but a considerably long one, and the topic wasn’t light at all. How much could he be sure that it wasn’t a delusion his mind had made up on its own?

If they had really had a conversation, why did they have it, and if he had forgotten, why did he forget? The Yuder at that time couldn’t make any hasty assumptions. In a situation where time had been turned back and he had returned, there was no evidence left, so he was just confused.

Even after he had learned secret information about Kishiar’s vessel and acknowledged to some extent that what he had seen in his dreams seemed to be real, Yuder had been doubting until recently whether some parts were really reality.

One of them was the part he was about to talk about now.

“Now, I act based on the belief that all the dreams I had were things that really happened. The part about the ‘connection’ that I’m going to tell you about is also something I learned from that dream.”

Yuder’s eyes darkened. He looked back on the past more carefully than ever before.

He didn’t know what Kishiar had done while staying in Peletta after leaving the Cavalry in his previous life. However, in the memory that Yuder had long forgotten, he said this at the last moment:

‘The inexplicable connection I made with you. Do you remember? What was connected that day was perhaps something deeper than our bodies… something that could be called a soul.’

His words, after a long search for what to do to sever something invisible, concluded that he could achieve the best results with his own power.

Yuder was perplexed. He couldn’t understand why he was saying such things only now, just before the last moment.

But the man just smiled with a tired face and tried to do something without hesitation.

‘It will be over soon. Pushing out all the connections until they are forcibly severed… and then…’

“…That is your last statement that I have remembered through dreams so far. I wanted to recall it in more detail, but I’ve never had a dream that showed the content after that.”

The man who had been listening to Yuder’s words without missing a single one opened his lips that had been silent.

“So, at the last moment, you mentioned the promise to resolve that ‘connection,’ and through the act of ‘pushing it away.’”

“Yes.”

The red eyes, lost in thought, stared at the glass of milk he was holding. Even Yuder couldn’t guess what he was thinking now.

“Is there any connection between hearing that statement in a dream and the advice you gave me about my power?”

The first question he finally asked seemed to be looking at a considerably different point from Yuder's words at first glance. However, as Kishiar had often done so far, Yuder answered without being flustered.

"Yes. There is a connection."

The Yuder in his previous life didn't know well what kind of ability Kishiar had. He even mistakenly guessed that his ability as an Awakener would be of a completely different type.

"Until I had that dream, I had guessed that your ability could only affect visible things. After having the dream, I started to think that my thoughts might not have been true. If it's true that you mentioned severing the connection by pushing it out, it would mean that you can use your power on something else that is invisible."

"Yes. That's right."

And the current Kishiar proved at once that Yuder's thoughts were correct. Until then, the power that had been used like an ability to help with physical techniques by pushing and pulling only the enemies he could see and confront with his eyes began to develop with tremendous possibilities in an instant.

As a result, although Kishiar himself didn't know because he couldn't see it, they learned that even the vessel inside him could be maintained by pulling it with his original ability, leading to saving Emperor Keilusa. Not only that, but in the recent battles in the south, his power played an indispensable role in achieving miraculous victories. It was a feat that could never have been achieved if he had only used it in the original way.

Thinking like that, the successes achieved in this life were all connected to one point, so to speak.

"If what I heard in that dream is true, you at that time tried to sever the connection once by using your power, or you might have severed it. But…"

“It probably wasn’t a perfect success. The evidence is that the connection between us hasn’t been severed and remains here, and it’s even increasing.”

“…”

Yuder silently nodded.

The two of them simultaneously looked at the golden threads floating between them. Yuder could tell without exchanging words that they were recalling the moment when they first recognized those threads. The ‘connection’ that existed clearly between them, thin and precarious as if it would break at any moment, but never breaking.

After a long silence, Yuder opened his mouth again.

“This is all I know about the connection. I might remember something I forgot in the future, but for now, that’s it.”

“Hmm… Can I ask you one thing?”

“Please feel free to speak.”

“In the previous game, it seems undeniable that both of you thought the connection should be severed. But then, what about now?”

A small breath echoed from under the golden hair resting on Yuder’s shoulder.

“Even now, if it’s possible, do you think it would be better without it?”

Yuder recalled the thread that was initially just a single, very thin strand. At that time, it looked precarious as if it would break at any moment, and at best, it only helped them recognize where each other was with difficulty.

However, as those threads increased and became more brilliant, more things began to be shared and exchanged between them. They became able to give and receive different emotions from before and read them, and they could also combine their powers and use their abilities using that connection.

Whenever he saw what they now called an imprint, Yuder felt a deep sense of stability. He also wanted to gaze at its dazzling beauty for a long time if possible. Just like when he looked at the man leaning on his shoulder.

Yuder slowly shook his head.

“No. I don’t think so now. Not at all.”

Kishiar, who had been quiet, finally let out a laugh. It was a slightly strange laugh that seemed both painful and not, but the arm embracing Yuder was indescribably warm.

“…I see. I’m glad. Because I feel the same way.”

The man who lightly lifted his head kissed him. After a brief silence rose and fell, Yuder took a deep breath and continued.

“Now that you know this much, I should also tell you about the dream I had before going out to the sea.”

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Chapter 985

“Now that you know this much, I should also tell you about the dream I had before going out to the sea.”

“Yes, I’m looking forward to hearing what that one was like,” Kishiar replied, shifting his position. This time, he set the milk glass on the bedside table and slid down to lie on Yuder’s legs. Looking down from above, Yuder could definitely see Kishiar’s face a little better than before, which he liked.

“Am I too heavy?” Kishiar asked.

“No,” Yuder answered, slipping his fingers through the strands of hair stuck to Kishiar’s forehead to brush them aside. The softly rustling sensation was very pleasant.

“Good.”

A nice scent wafted from Kishiar, who was elegantly stretched out like a satisfied predator under Yuder’s touch. As Yuder traced Kishiar’s straight forehead with his fingertips, he carefully caressed Kishiar’s cheeks and ears, following the alluring scent that seemed to guide him. Kishiar’s blinking red eyes closed halfway, looking much more at ease.

Honestly, in that moment, Yuder thought about kissing Kishiar a little more rather than talking. If he hadn’t been clearly aware of the importance of the story he had to tell, he would have gladly given in to that impulse.

The third white glove dream he had this time was very important. If it weren’t for that dream, Yuder wouldn’t have been able to change his thoughts about the hand wearing the white glove as he did now, and he might not have been able to face the disaster that hit the South so calmly.

And even now, the memory of looking inside the glove at the bare skin remained like a nail stuck in the corner of Yuder’s heart…

“…”

A feeling similar to the moment when he stared at the horizon beyond the fog-filled sea, convinced that the waves had been resolved, came over him. The moment Yuder let out a long breath to release that feeling from within himself, Kishiar raised his hand and placed it over Yuder’s hand resting on his cheek.

The two hands, gripping each other tightly, were slowly led to Kishiar’s chest.

Through the open shirt, Yuder could feel the warm body temperature on the skin touching his hand.

The gentle rising and falling movement with each breath.

And the heart beating well without any problem.

Kishiar had the ability to give Yuder what he needed without any conversation. Even if it was something Yuder himself didn’t know he wanted.

Yuder’s lips slowly parted. The first words flowed out much more smoothly than he had agonized over.

“In the dream I had that day, I was still in a black space. Since I was meeting the white-gloved hand for the third time, I thought I would ask the questions I was curious about while I had the chance. I was also going to make it clear that I didn’t go there again because I wanted to.”

Honestly, it wasn’t a very mature attitude. Seeing the white glove that didn’t react no matter what he said reminded him of Kishiar from his previous life, which annoyed him.

However, the reaction the hand showed to Yuder’s attitude, full of complaints like a real twenty-year-old…

At that moment, the chest under their overlapping hands suddenly swelled. It was because Kishiar laughed. As their eyes met, Kishiar shook his head

with a deliberately serious expression.

“Hmm… I’m sorry for suddenly laughing. I couldn’t help but find it adorable when I thought about how you might have said it. So? What did the other party answer?”

Yuder silently looked down at the man’s laughter before replying.

“The reaction was exactly… the same as now.”

Unlike Kishiar from his previous life, the current Kishiar often laughed in various ways when looking at Yuder. When Yuder had just joined the Cavalry, Kishiar showed a glamorous, wall-like smile not much different from what he showed others. Sometimes, he showed the habitual smile of someone trying to maintain patience in a difficult situation. Occasionally, there was also a painful smile that appeared briefly, mixed with agony, among his many smiles.

And when Kishiar’s feelings toward Yuder flowed out sincerely, he would laugh almost without making a sound, just like now.

Like a breeze gently tickling his hair.

With a dense emotion that seemed to change even the air.

No one in the world would imagine Kishiar laughing like that, but Yuder had already seen that smile many times. Now, he could roughly picture in his mind what kind of smile Kishiar was making just by the slight change in the surrounding air.

That’s why, even with only the hand and the changing air around the other party, Yuder could imagine that expression.

With an utterly bewildering feeling.

Yuder continued speaking while looking at Kishiar’s face, who had stopped laughing.

“Even though there was only a pair of hands, I could tell. And then it answered me.”

It said it was really amazing that Yuder treated it as itself, even though only that much remained.

“It did say it would be better not to… but it also replied that the guesses I had made were almost correct. Of course, the guesses I mentioned then were…”

“The things I had said?” Kishiar asked in response.

“Yes.”

“I see… And what else did it say?”

“It said that I have these dreams of going there when ‘the gap widens.’”

“A gap. Does it mean a crack?”

“It said ‘between there and here,’ I thought it might be.”

But Yuder still couldn’t figure out exactly what the next words meant.

“‘Then you are naturally drawn. By the remnants of power that hasn’t completely burnt out at the end of causality…’”

“‘Through the connection.’”

“Connection,” Kishiar muttered, following Yuder’s words. They simultaneously looked at the golden threads hanging between them. They had seen it earlier, but now their gaze held a much heavier weight.

The beating in Yuder’s chest, and the beating under the skin where his hand rested, both seemed to beat a little louder for a moment, as if they had made a promise.

“I thought about what the word ‘power’ meant when it mentioned the remnants of power that hadn’t completely burnt out. I felt that if I could see

the hand under the glove, I might be able to find out more of the answer. So… I took it off.”

The white-gloved hand did not resist Yuder’s movement.

Inside the removed glove, there was a scar infinitely similar to the mark left on Yuder’s hand now, but much more terrible.

Yuder had seen them before in the forgotten memories called dreams, so he knew that Kishiar from his previous life seemed to have had problems with the vessel again during the Red Stone retrieval mission. However, he never expected to confirm that evidence there, in that way.

No matter how close to the truth his guess was, the moment of directly confirming it was never the same as what he had thought in his head.

How could he possibly describe how he felt at that moment?

Kishiar’s bare hand, which Yuder had never seen even once during the nearly two years of his previous life.

The traces of the answer that held all the truths Yuder wanted to know but couldn’t, the truths he didn’t want to believe.

Just recalling the emotions he felt then made his hands tremble slightly. Even though he had started the story after sufficiently preparing himself, the truth related to Kishiar always shook Yuder.

If Kishiar’s hand hadn’t gripped his hand a little tighter, it might have been difficult for him to continue the story. Yuder opened his dry lips slightly, looking at the long fingers tightly holding his hand as if to cover and swallow all the trembling of his hand and firmly support it.

“…Actually, I…”

“…”

“As you may already know, I didn’t have… particularly good feelings towards the previous Commander.”

“…”

“He taught me many things, but at the same time, he revealed nothing. I thought that just as I came to resent and hate him… he must have felt the same way about me from the beginning. That seeking me out was just a momentary whim, like a fleeting fancy. That we were merely tied together by ill fate, our paths crossing for a brief moment in life, never to be connected again.”

And their relationship had come to an end with the worst possible outcome befitting such words.

One as a murderer, the other as the murdered.

Yuder had deliberately tried to never think of him again. He thought everything had ended like that.

“But the moment I saw those scars there… everything I had seen and experienced since coming back flashed through my mind.”

The man he now knew.

How much he was a person worthy of love.

And how much he, too, cherished and loved Yuder unconditionally and blindly.

The face of the Emperor who, facing death due to the aftereffects of the injury to his vessel, couldn’t even bring himself to touch his wife and put on an endlessly cold facade.

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Chapter 986

Yuder nodded his head. “No matter how unbelievable it may be, if there’s only one answer left after eliminating all others…”

“…If that’s the answer, then I have no choice but to believe it.”

The words he had spoken before, when he had entrusted his faith to Yuder, were repeated once more. Yuder nodded.

“Yes. It was only then that I could finally understand how you were able to say those words back then, Commander.”

In that moment, he couldn’t help but believe to his very bones that the person in front of his eyes and the existence left only in his dreams were fundamentally the same person.

No matter what different experiences they had gone through or what different choices they had made, he was still Kishiar.

He was far from the rotten nobles who treated commoners like trash, and like the emperor who shared the same blood, he could sometimes push away the things he loved without batting an eye for the sake of something precious.

If necessary to achieve his goals, he could put on a perfect act that no one would be able to see through.

He was definitely that kind of person.

Come to think of it, when judged objectively, Yudrain Aile and the Cavalry had nothing to lose and everything to gain from Kishiar’s death. First of all, the risk of being purged alongside the last descendant of the old imperial family, who had an infinitely high possibility of being targeted by a new power sooner or later, had disappeared. By taking responsibility for that dangerous and immoral mission and succeeding alone, he had also gained

the deep trust of Emperor Katchian, which was not easily obtained by any other means. Even the scandals of sodomy and favoritism that had arisen over Yudrain's appointment as Commander had been buried in people's memories without a trace some time after Kishiar's death. Rumors about a person who had disappeared were inherently short-lived.

The only rumor left in the place where those shameful scandals had disappeared was an underground rumor that Yuder had assassinated Duke Peletta. Those who did not forget that secret story avoided and looked down on him, but they could not dare to treat him carelessly.

Any citizen of the Orr Empire would inevitably have a mythical image, to a greater or lesser extent, of the bloodline of the old imperial family that had continued for a thousand years. Even if Duke Peletta was so pathetic that it was obvious he would disappear someday, the value of his noble blood was real, making it difficult for everyone. If it was true that a mere commoner had killed and eliminated him without a hint of fear, who on earth could make Yudrain Aile afraid? It was close to a superstitious feeling that they didn't want to say outright, but that's why it had the greatest effect of all.

It was no exaggeration to say that the reason Yuder, despite being a commoner and an omega Awakener who was easy to ignore, was able to fully grasp the Cavalry, the continent's greatest military force, and yet experience little trouble on the surface, was all thanks to that incident.

The only loss, if any, was that he had forgotten the memories related to Kishiar without even knowing it, but Yuder had stayed away from everything related to him until he was executed, so he never felt any discomfort. One cannot suffer for what one does not know in the first place.

Was it really a coincidence that no one had rushed to avenge Duke Peletta after Kishiar's death? Was the quiet disappearance of Nathan Zuckerman and disbandment of the Peletta Knights, who ought to not hesitate to use any means to kill Yuder, truly without Kishiar's influence?

He didn't know then, but he knew now. They were people who would not move without Kishiar's orders.

Conversely, it also meant that if Kishiar gave an order, they would have tried to follow it, no matter how incomprehensible it might be.

Since Yuder had successfully completed the assassination mission, the Emperor did not escalate the incident and buried it as quietly as possible. He probably didn't want to give any excuse for the old imperial family's friendly forces to unite. As Duke Peletta's death was quietly buried, the blade of purge hardly reached those who followed him, and everything ended with just the dissolution. Another big reason was that no one knew the extent of the abilities of the knights and the adjutant who followed Duke Peletta, so they thought they weren't even worth being wary of. Even Yuder, who roughly knew Nathan Zuckerman's hidden skills, didn't properly know his past and loyalty, so he lost interest not long after hearing the news of his disappearance.

Therefore, in the end, the only life that died and disappeared because of that incident was Kishiar La Orr.

None of those who followed him, not even Yuder who went to assassinate him, were injured at all. Everyone survived, so naturally that there was no room for suspicion.

A natural and traceless disappearance. How strange is this? More difficult than destroying and killing something is saving something and sending it out of the public eye.

Just look at the Pearl Tower destruction incident that happened a few years later. After it collapsed, related incidents kept happening, causing so much social disruption.

The greenhorn who had just become a Commander didn't have the judgment to read between the lines of that naturalness.

But now he knew. Now that he had come to know the current Kishiar, he could guess through him.

Kishiar wanted those who followed him not to suffer just because of that reason, and to be safe if possible. If he had to prepare for after his

disappearance in a situation where he was facing death, the first thing he would have considered was the safety of those around him.

And perhaps, in that safety of those around him, Yuder Aile himself was definitely included…

When he thought that far, he couldn’t bear the fire burning in his heart.

Yuder finally put into words the one and only answer left at the end of all the pain that had swirled in his head.

“In the end, I had no choice but to admit that even the you over there, because you are you, may have acted for me in your own way.”

“…”

“That even not telling me anything about you may have actually been intentional. Rather, if it’s the you I know, it makes more sense. When I realized that all the remaining circumstances fit better with that… I couldn’t think of anything.”

When he came to his senses, a white-gloved hand was wiping away his tears, and for the first time, he realized that he was crying.

That cold yet kind touch.

The consolation that was not a consolation from the existence that had flowed away and disappeared into the past gave Yuder more certainty about the answer left to him.

So it was painful.

It was just as painful to say it out loud, but at least this time, he didn’t shed tears without knowing it. Yuder slowly lifted the corners of his lips, feeling Kishiar’s strongly beating heart under his fingertips.

Even if no one else could feel that he was smiling, the man in front of him would surely know.

“…But even without a body, as expected of the Commander, he pulled me along and took me somewhere, telling me to look at something important. There, I saw the strange crack and terribly shaped things.”

A crack that was the only thing that looked like it had been cut with a knife in a completely black world, and the blue sea beyond it. And the mountain of terrible beings that trampled and swallowed each other to somehow get out toward it.

“When I realized that there was a sea beyond it, the southern earthquake was the first thing that came to mind. It must have been trying to warn me that it would happen soon and what kind of things would cross over the cracks.”

The dream ended like that. However, before falling and waking up, Yuder clearly declared to the white-gloved hand.

“As I said upon waking, I will save you.”

The referent of “you” was quite ambiguous.

It was both the white-gloved hand left alone in the darkness behind the crack, and the man who was now lying on Yuder’s lap, exhaling thin breaths.

For Yuder, the distinction between the two was now meaningless.

“There may have been more things related to the Commander of the previous game that I still don’t know about. No, there probably are. I can’t be sure that I have all the memories. But it doesn’t matter.”

Even the southern earthquake, which he had thought might be impossible to solve despite preparing so much, had now faded beyond his memory. So perhaps it would be the right path to let the white-gloved hand fade into memory too, but Yuder didn’t think so.

“…That is all I wanted to say.”

He looked down at Kishiar and quietly asked.

“By any chance, after hearing this story, were you displeased?”

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Chapter 987

“By any chance, after hearing this story, were you displeased?”

Yuder waited for the answer to return, quietly counting the heartbeats racing beneath his hand.

Thump, thump, thump.

When the pulse had beaten exactly 21 times, Kishiar’s voice finally reached his ears.

“Why do you think… I would dislike it?”

Yuder answered honestly.

“Because when I first spoke about the previous game, Commander, you seemed to not have very good feelings about the Commander from that previous game.”

Kishiar didn’t have memories like Yuder did, and today’s story wasn’t information that would make him feel good just by knowing it. If he felt that Yuder was identifying himself with someone else that Kishiar couldn’t empathize with, he might regret agreeing to listen.

Of course, Kishiar could say no for Yuder’s sake, but emotions don’t flow so rationally.

The man staring at Yuder asked again.

“What if I said I disliked it?”

“…To be honest. There’s not much I can do about it.”

That was something Yuder had already thought about from the moment he decided to tell the story, knowing that Kishiar might regret it.

If Kishiar was hurt or regretted it because of this story, Yuder would feel the pain of having told it very intensely. But there was nothing more he could do other than take all of that into account. It wasn't like he could take back the story he had already told, and there was no way to erase the memories. That was all that had to be endured by choosing the option of confession.

However.

"But… I think it's better than not having told you."

There are things in this world one must do, even knowing they won't always lead to good outcomes.

The white-gloved hand made Yuder realize that.

'You changed me like that.'

Yuder closed his eyes.

And when he opened them again,

"Yes. You're right about that."

Seeing the smile on the man's face as he looked up at Yuder while lying down, Yuder's breath stopped for a moment.

The man's eyes, smiling like scattered flowers, were wet with rain-like moisture.

Within their locked gazes, the heart beneath Yuder's palm raced, beating so hard and fast it seemed it would burst. A droplet that fell from the edge of the unblinking red eyes flowed down, leaving a transparent trail and a mark on Yuder's leg.

That mark, so small it was hard to even notice, felt like a burning brand to Yuder.

Even if fire flowed, water burned, wind collapsed, and earth blew, it would be impossible to fully describe the face before his eyes and the shock it

brought.

Yuder slowly reached out and wiped the corners of Kishiar's eyes. As he looked down at the moisture wetting his hand, Kishiar spoke again.

"You're right. It's definitely better to have spoken than not to, and even if it's more painful to know than not to know, it lets you know the path you can walk on."

"…"

"Thank you for telling me the story. It may seem strange to you, but… I was happy."

Yuder's eyes blinked slowly.

"Happy… you say."

"Yes."

"You don't regret it, or wish you hadn't heard it?"

Kishiar's lips pulled into a slightly wider smile.

"Do you remember? I once told you that when I was young, I briefly dreamed of becoming someone like a hero from legends."

Yuder remembered. It was something he had heard in his previous life, during the period when Kishiar had to cover his eyes for a while due to an injury after killing the huge monster called Pethuamet.

"After I came to admit that I couldn't achieve that dream on my own, I tried to forget for a while that I even had such a dream. Because recalling it made me newly realize that I was in a position where I couldn't achieve my dream, let alone do anything, due to the limitations of my body and vessel."

"…"

“But when I arrived in Peletta and thought everything had fallen to a point where it couldn’t get any worse, I recalled that word again. This time, not as a name I wanted to become, but as the name of someone who might help me.”

In the silence, the low voice continued.

“I wished for someone to suddenly appear and help me. For some hero to free me from the painful end that was scheduled no matter how much I struggled. And if I could go forward together with that hero… then how happy would I be? I could think there was a reason I was born like this.”

Kishiar closed his mouth and laughed very softly.

“It was a childish thought.”

No. It’s not a childish thought, it’s a thought anyone would have if they were human.

If anyone had lost everything and ended up exiled to a remote place, if they knew that no matter what they did, the future that remained was only to explode and die in terrible pain someday, they would have wished for salvation.

Yuder wanted to say that, but Kishiar’s words continued, so he didn’t open his mouth.

“But just now, I suddenly realized. Salvation has already surprisingly been achieved for me, and I’ve even gained the opportunity to save someone together with the one who extended that hand of salvation to me.”

“…”

“That’s how what you just said sounded to me.”

Yuder was unable to continue speaking for a long time, then shook his head.

“No. I…”

“You said you would save me. Do you intend to do all of that alone?”

The question that cut off his words was clear, as if it already knew the answer. Yuder looked at the moisture wetting his fingertips and sighed.

“…No.”

“…”

“I learned thoroughly this time that I can’t do everything alone. So for this matter too, of course I need you, Commander.”

“See.”

Kishiar laughed refreshingly, but with all the pain and sense of liberation. At the same time, more water flowed down and pooled on Yuder’s hand.

“I can’t be completely sure since I’ve never stood at the same crossroads, but I want to say one thing. If I were him,”

And if he were me.

The mumbling lips hesitated for a very brief moment, then opened wide so Yuder could hear clearly.

“I would never have resented or hated you for a single moment.”

“…”

“And I wouldn’t have been disappointed that you harbored such feelings. Even if it were this very moment, it would be the same.”

Because, I too am like that.

Yuder lowered his head. He couldn’t just keep looking at the man’s face any longer.

As he buried his face in the man’s chest as if collapsing, arms came and embraced Yuder’s body in return. Beyond their bodies overlapping without

a single gap as if they would die if separated, Yuder thought of a certain man he had considered long gone.

In his faint memories, that man was smiling, tired but with sincere eyes.

“Now I hear you wield a sword that’s quite good no matter where you use it. It would have been nice to have a bit more time to teach you.”

“…It’s because you only wander around at night, Commander.”

“Haha. Sometimes there are circumstances where you have to wander only at night.”

“I don’t really want to know.”

“Right. Come to think of it, I have a scheduled meeting for drinks and reports tomorrow afternoon in my office. Would you like to continue today’s matters there?”

“You mean there?”

“It won’t be bad. The space is quite wide too. And I’ll make sure it’s just the two of us, so there’s no need to worry about someone overhearing.”

“…”

“How about it? Want to try it once?”

“…Yes.”

“Okay. Good.”

The hand that approached with a laugh to ruffle Yuder’s hair paused for a moment. Yuder stared for a long time at the back of the person lowering his arm and turning to walk away.

It was probably for the best that there was no needless contact, yet strangely, a sense of longing crept in, despite his awareness…

“…Ah.”

The moment he recalled up to that point, an old hole that had been pierced in his heart was filled in that instant.

Yuder pondered that memory for a long time with his face buried in the embrace.

The feeling of regaining something you didn’t know you had lost is never a happy one. But Kishiar would say even that was happiness, so Yuder also decided to accept it that way now.

He gave a new name to this poignant pain he felt.

-

“There, all done.”

Lusan, who had returned, finally visited the Commander’s office and completely healed Kishiar’s remaining external injuries. Yuder felt refreshed seeing the wound marks cleanly erased wherever the pure white light flowed.

“Thank you, Priest.”

“Thanks, Priest Lusan. You must still be very tired.”

“No, it’s alright. Then I’ll be going to take care of the others now! Call me anytime if you need me.”

Lusan smiled shyly and soon left. Kishiar looked in the mirror, rubbed his chin, and winked with a refreshed look.

“Hmm. Now it really feels like everything is back in its place.”

“I’m glad you recovered without any problems.”

“Thank you. So… before we start catching up on the backlog of work, shall we go over one thing I didn’t get to ask yesterday as we both fell asleep?”

The man turned to Yuder with a smile.

“How does my assistant plan to rescue the beauty trapped in the tower?”

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Chapter 988

“How does my assistant plan to rescue the beauty trapped in the tower?”

No matter how accustomed Yuder had become to Kishiar’s words and actions, there were still times when he couldn’t help but ask for clarification. This was one of those moments. “The beauty in the tower… you say?”

“Well, even if it’s just a hand, the main body would still have the same face, right?”

“…”

Kishiar shamelessly tapped his own cheek with his finger and smiled. There wasn’t a hint of embarrassment in his twinkling eyes. Yuder stared at that face and silently thought to himself.

‘…Well, it’s not wrong. If anything, it’s a bit too fitting.’

The metaphor of the beauty in the tower originated from a famous anecdote about a woman who was imprisoned in the Regien Tower, where nobles were mainly confined, a long time ago. Even Beltrail, the priest of the Apeto family who was tortured by Nahan, had been imprisoned there until his death, showing how ancient the place was.

Anyway, the legendary woman in the story was renowned for her extraordinary beauty. When her beloved was falsely accused, she volunteered to go to prison in his stead until he could prove his innocence and return. Nowadays, it was rare for someone to be imprisoned in place of a criminal, but in the past, it seemed to have been quite common, like taking a hostage, so it wasn’t unusual.

She was originally supposed to be confined in a regular prison, but due to several incidents caused by her excessively beautiful appearance, she was eventually moved to the top of the tower.

If only the reason for her imprisonment had been resolved well, she probably could have left that place and lived without any problems. The problem was that no matter how long she waited, the lover who had left to prove his innocence never returned. It was unknown whether he had run away or if something had happened to him, but since the criminal did not return, the woman found herself in a difficult situation. People who pitied her flocked like clouds, pleading for her release, and it almost happened. However, in the end, she never came out from the top of the tower.

The last words she left to the people were that she believed in her lover's innocence and had no intention of leaving there on her own until he returned. No one could forcibly drag out someone who refused to rely on the sympathy of others and chose to imprison herself in the tower.

Even now, when people mentioned the beauty in the tower, everyone thought of the beauty in that story.

A beautiful person who chose not to come out of the tower to uphold their intended purpose.

Even if that purpose was an eternal wait that could never be fulfilled, she chose to fade away and be forgotten there rather than express resentment towards anyone.

Doesn't it sound too similar to someone?

Yuder stared at Kishiar's smiling face for a moment before opening his mouth.

"Almost every time I went there, it was related to anomalous cracks."

Either a large anomalous crack had occurred and been resolved, or it was just before one was about to occur.

There were many times when Yuder's health condition wasn't very good, but the last time he saw it, he wasn't in such a state, so he excluded it from the commonalities for now.

“Although we managed to prevent the great southern earthquake this time, there are still many disasters that I remember. I can no longer be certain which of them will happen first… but didn’t we learn something important that I didn’t know back then?”

“The cause, you mean,” Kishiar replied, emphasizing the word.

Yuder nodded.

“Yes. We learned that there were those who forcibly shook and distorted the balance of the southern lands, promoting the occurrence of anomalous cracks. I don’t think they will stop doing such things just because they were thwarted this time.”

The ‘Wolf’s Eye’ tribe of the southern country, led by Aton.

If it was true that they had done the same things in the previous life, forcibly bringing about disasters, they would surely continue to attempt the same things this time as well.

‘From what I heard, it wasn’t something they prepared for just a day or two. If it was such a grand undertaking, they wouldn’t easily give up just because they failed once or twice.’

If they were the type of people to do that, they wouldn’t have even attempted it in the first place, spending such a long time. And Yuder was someone who had returned from a world where he already knew what had happened when their plans had all succeeded.

“As long as they continue to cause trouble, I will also continue to stop them, so there will be endless opportunities to encounter anomalous cracks.”

“And each time, you’ll have a chance to make contact with the beauty beyond the crack, I suppose?”

“For now, I believe that will be the case.”

Although the white-gloved hand seemed to wish for Yuder not to come there again, what could be done?

“We’ll need to seriously and extensively conduct research on anomalous cracks.”

“That will also be necessary, but…”

Yuder paused for a moment after saying that, took a breath, and spoke more cautiously with a subdued gaze.

What he was about to say next was likely to be very unpleasant for Kishiar to hear.

“The next time I face an anomalous crack, I’m also considering making direct contact with it myself.”

“…Direct contact?”

“If it’s a crack without monsters emerging, it might be possible to cross over the gap while still having a physical body, don’t you think?”

If he hadn’t seen the crevice that seemed to be connected to the deep sea in the dream he had this time, he wouldn’t have even thought of it.

Unlike ordinary cracks, anomalous cracks existed in one place for a considerably long time. If the other side was the same dark place where the white glove was, wouldn’t it be possible to cross over and take a look if done well?

Of course, no one knew when, where, or how an anomalous crack would appear, and what would happen in the process.

“Of course, I know it’s a reckless idea. But if we gather as much information as possible about the cracks in advance and find out how the cracks and this place are connected, and then try to find a way to attempt it…”

“You know it’s reckless,” Kishiar replied without changing his expression.

“And you’re saying this knowing full well how dangerous it is, right?”

Of course, he knew. It was just a few days ago that he had directly seen and confronted a massive anomalous crack in the sea that was terrifying to even look at.

Whether large or small, the mere sight of a crack made one instinctively feel that its existence was something extremely wrong. It would be stranger not to feel a sense of ominousness and danger when looking at the surreal crevice that was like an egg sac containing monsters that would soon appear.

Even Yuder himself had felt the need to eliminate it immediately when he saw a crack, but he had never thought of wanting to approach it closely. Its existence inevitably made all living beings feel death.

In his previous life, when he was tracking anomalous cracks and searching for information, he had heard many stories, like ghost tales, of people who had recklessly approached them without knowing better and died or disappeared without a trace. He had only witnessed it directly once in that life, and even then, it was very brief and disappeared quickly, but the instinctive sense of ominousness he felt at that time remained vivid even after he had died and returned.

Even now, when he had come to witness many anomalous cracks, that thought hadn’t changed. If anything, it had only grown stronger.

It was not an existence that would ever have a positive impact on this world. It was ominous and absolutely could not be left alone, the starting point of a fearsome disaster.

All of those things…

“Of course, I know, but I don’t think it’s a bad idea to consider this as one of the many possibilities. As you said, don’t we need to do at least that much to bring back the beauty in the tower? Don’t worry, I have no intention of risking my life.”

“It sounds no different from saying you’d willingly jump off a cliff if there’s even a possibility of looking down into the valley below, but I understand that’s what you think for now.”

“…”

Kishiar, who had given an extremely cold answer in a calm voice, stared at Yuder with a thoughtful expression.

“I’m glad I asked first, after all.”

Kishiar’s lips let out a sigh-like laugh as he looked at Yuder with eyes filled with various emotions that were difficult to fully grasp. The voice that followed was a bit softer than before.

“I haven’t heard of anyone currently conducting research on cracks, but if we search, we might be able to find traces of similar research in the old archives of the Pearl Tower. And above all, don’t we have… clues related to the research of the first Duke Tain and the research of the Great Mage Luma?”

“Yes. We definitely need to look into that as well.”

“Right. Make sure to seek the opinion of the pharmacist as well. We can discuss the method together, so never act alone. This isn’t an order, but a request.”

He said it wasn’t an order, but Yuder wondered if it was his imagination that there seemed to be emphasis on the word “make sure.” He thought that perhaps it was a bit hasty of him to mention the method of contacting the crack first.

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Chapter 989

After the sweet rest following the massive battle ended, the Southern Branch of the Cavalry, which had begun to busily move again, was full of vitality. Of course, this was partly due to the fact that there were far more members and guests packed tightly than before, but there was a sense of leisure and liveliness overflowing everywhere that could never be explained by that alone.

However, the medical department was an exception to that.

“Ah! Pharmacist! Please! How can you tell me not to eat candy while taking such unpalatable medicine!”

“Choose. Either suffer for two weeks because the candy ruins the medicine’s effectiveness, or quietly endure it and recover in a week.”

“I really don’t want to say this unless I have to…! But after taking it for three days straight, I have to know what it’s made of, even out of curiosity! What on earth did you use to make it taste so terrible?”

“Why do you need to know? It’s not poisoned, so just bear with it!”

The medical department was filled with wailing voices because the taste of the new medicine Enon had created for the overwhelming influx of patients was reminiscent of torture. Lusan squeezed through the patients who were rolling around on their beds, retching after taking the medicine.

“I thought it would be fine since Yuder drank twice as much without any problem when he came earlier… Sir Enon, how about reducing the dosage for those who are struggling a lot?”

It was a kind compromise born out of compassion in its own way. However, to the ears of the Cavalry members, it sounded like an icy question: ‘Yuder can take it without a word, so why can’t you?’ Of course, even though they

knew it wasn’t meant that way, sometimes things that were too pure could be more provocative.

Those who had turned pale while holding back their nausea looked at each other and muttered, raising their trembling hands.

“Wait a moment. I’ll just take it…”

“Me too…”

“Oh? You can take it? If it’s too hard, you don’t have to take it all now…”

“I can drink it! Because I’m a Cavalry member!”

“Oh, I see. Alright then…”

The members snatched the medicine from Lusan’s hands, each closing their eyes tightly and vigorously pouring the contents into their open mouths.

And a moment later.

“Ugh…!”

“Kuh-heuk, blergh, uuugh!”

Accompanied by indescribably terrible groans, people collapsed here and there, clutching their throats. Of course, since they had fallen on their respective beds, the soft mattresses safely caught them, and no one was injured.

Lusan, who was dumbfounded, checked their physical conditions and covered them with blankets before turning to Enon.

“What is it? Why are they suddenly trying so hard to take it…”

Enon replied with a nonchalant face.

“They say the most frightening thing is ignorance.”

“Pardon?”

“Never mind. It’s a relief that everyone is taking the medicine well now that you, little one, have returned. Keep doing that next time too.”

“What did I do?”

Enon didn’t answer. Since this wasn’t the first or second time, Lusan wasn’t particularly curious about the answer.

“Hmm. It seems like everyone has a much stronger sense of responsibility and belonging compared to before, while I was away. Actually, seeing how the Cavalry feels much more precious to me after this southern battle… I guess everyone felt a similar realization, right?”

“Who knows. If you ask me, I’d say they’ve gone crazy as a group…”

Enon’s eyes swept over the members lying here and there, then fixed on a room with a closed door inside the medical department.

“…Well. This isn’t a knightly order that prioritizes solemn discipline and accumulated time, nor a mage’s guild that says there’s no hierarchy in the face of freedom and enlightenment. I guess it’s developed its own color.”

“Ah! Those words are really cool. I think you’re right. The Cavalry is definitely not a knightly order or a mage’s guild. It’s an organization that has a new color unlike any other place and can do anything… I really like that it’s so Cavalry-like.”

“Is that so.”

Judging from Enon’s sullen expression alone, he didn’t seem to sympathize with Lusan’s words at all. However, Lusan knew from his experience so far that he was surprisingly good at taking care of people and had a deep consideration for them, so he just smiled brightly.

“Sir Enon, you’ve been working hard staying up several nights alone to take care of patients and make new medicines, so please go in and rest now. I’ll

take care of the rest since we've had a breather. There's someone waiting in the room over there, right?"

Enon clicked his tongue and got up from his seat.

"Who's worrying about whom? The guy who went to the temple after being exhausted of divine power is talking well. …But I'll go finish talking to the waiting guy and come back, so keep an eye on things until then."

"Yes. You can take your time."

Enon put his hands in the pockets of his outer coat and sauntered over to open the door of the inner room. Inside was Yuder, who had come down earlier, taken the medicine, and had been waiting all this time.

"Are all the urgent matters taken care of now?"

"Yeah."

In front of Yuder, there was a medicine bowl identical to the one the Cavalry members had taken and collapsed earlier. However, his was just about twice as large as the bowls the others had drunk from.

Enon sat down and crossed his legs, looking down at the empty bowl with displeasure.

"The other guys were making a fuss saying they couldn't take it, but you're not making a big deal out of it?"

"It's not poison that'll kill me if I take it, it's medicine."

"You're right, but why does it annoy me so much when you say it?"

"If you want, I can make a big deal out of it right here."

"And then watch you suddenly prostrate yourself like last time? Forget it. If you're a patient, just stay put like a patient, please."

As he listened to Enon’s grumbling, the corners of Yuder’s mouth moved faintly upward and then returned to their original position. Enon’s bright yellow eyes closely examined his face and entire body.

“How’s your strength recovery going?”

“Not bad. It seems like it’ll take a few weeks to fully recover to the level before the battle, but if someone tries to kill me here right now, I’m well enough to bury them on the spot.”

“Yeah. You’re saying you’re fine, aren’t you?”

“Because I rested obediently as I was told to.”

The corners of Enon’s eyes twitched. It was because he had guessed what Yuder had been doing while resting. However, in the end, it was Enon himself who had told him to do so. He took a deep breath and suppressed the surging emotion.

“…On the day of the waves, your soul’s condition didn’t look so good, so I was a bit worried, but for now, there’s no major problem. You said not all the strings tied to the sword were cut off, right?”

Yuder quietly nodded.

“There was a reason for that. I was busy at the time, so I couldn’t tell you, but right before the waves came, I had another dream. A dream about the hand wearing a white glove.”

“Ha… Yeah. I knew you’d probably say something like that.”

This wasn’t the first time Yuder had come to see Enon as soon as he recovered and was able to go out. And every time, he would add a few new incredible stories that would make Enon’s head hurt.

Still, this time, it was after everything had been resolved well, so no matter what he said, it wouldn’t be as infuriating as before.

That’s what Enon thought.

Not expecting that thought to be shattered greatly just a few minutes after Yuder started talking.

“…That’s about all I’ve told the commander.”

“…”

“That guy?”

“…”

Enon, who had been looking down with his arms crossed, raised his eyes. His bright yellow eyes, which were already an uncommon color, were very good at revealing the emotions he felt, and now they were shining as brightly as ever, arguably the best he had ever seen.

“Let me ask you one thing first. Did your Commander… tell you to come here by any chance?”

“That’s right. He told me to tell you if possible.”

“That damn guy must have pushed it onto me because he thought it wouldn’t work if he said it himself.”

Enon, who cursed without hesitation, let out a short breath, “ha, ha.”

“Then I’ll have to respond accordingly.”

The mirage-like smile that had hung on the handsome pharmacist’s lips for a moment was quickly replaced by two hands that shot out with fiery anger, mercilessly grabbing Yuder’s cheeks and stretching them.

“I fixed you up with great difficulty, and now you’re saying you’ve thought of a new way to try dying again? Which mouth is saying that? This mouth, huh?!”

“…”

“As you said, of course, you could try such a terrible method if you wanted to. But no one knows if the place you’re thinking of exists beyond the cracks that have appeared. Even if it does! Do you know how weak the human body is? Ordinary, average humans would have their souls shaken just by getting close to those anomalous cracks! Just like how humans who get close to monsters have their souls worn down, whether they win or lose!”

“Wait… Enon…”

“You seem to think your body is very strong, but it’s not! Sure, you may have been born with good material! You’re not someone who would lose anywhere! But that’s not all there is to it! You could really die! Do you not know what dying is? Huh?”

“…”

It was long past the usual time for letting go before Einon’s grip finally loosened. Yuder looked at Enon, feeling the most stinging sensation on his face that he had ever experienced. In the gaze they exchanged, Enon declared with a serious face, as if telling him to listen carefully.

“Erase that plan from your mind right now.”

“I’m not saying I’ll do it right away. It’s just one of the possibilities…”

“You’ll try it if you think it’s feasible after saying that. Do you think I don’t know you? What about your Commander?”

“…”

“You said you’re going to save that white-gloved guy, right? But what happens next if you save him and you die? Have you ever thought about that?”

Yuder fell silent. Of course, he had never specifically thought about saving Kishiar and dying himself, but…

‘If I can save him, I thought I should be prepared to pay a certain price. Even if it’s not my life.’

However, he knew it wasn’t the time to express such thoughts here.

In the end, Yuder was able to escape from Enon’s attack only after saying about ten times that he would properly abandon and discard his plan. If it had been possible, Enon would have made him take an oath.

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Chapter 990

The last moments in the south passed by quickly. Most of the unit members had finished their preparations to leave, and some who had recovered relatively early from their injuries had already departed for the capital due to urgent matters. However, the majority of those who had made significant contributions in the recent battle, including the Deputy Commanders, remained, and the Cavalry Commander Kishiar and his aide Yuder were among them. The reason was simple.

“Commander, the official invitation from House Herne has finally arrived,” an attendant announced.

“Oh, it seems she has finally received a response from Their Majesties,” Kishiar remarked.

Myra, who had been continuously postponing the succession ceremony, had finally found the leisure to prioritize her own affairs. Throughout the long history of the empire, the succession ceremonies of the four grand ducal houses were incomparably special compared to other noble families. Although there were many nobles in the empire, only those four houses had the right to directly request and receive letters expressing recognition and congratulations from the current emperor and empress when inheriting their titles.

Of course, there were instances when considerable power struggles occurred over this procedure when the relationship between the imperial family and the ducal houses was not amicable. When the noble factions who were reluctant to acknowledge the emperor’s authority gained power, the ducal houses would sometimes refrain from requesting the letter to embarrass the imperial family. Conversely, the emperor would occasionally refuse to send the letter despite receiving the request in order to undermine the power of the ducal houses.

Yuder, having witnessed the covert struggles fought over this matter in his previous life when Emperor Katchian was actively trying to suppress the

power of the four noble houses, was well aware of it. However, Myra El Herne had no reason to engage in such tactics, so she followed the normal procedure and sent a letter to the capital. The emperor and empress also gladly reciprocated with a letter filled with blessings. As Myra had directly informed the Cavalry about the related news while sending the letter, they had essentially already been invited, and the official invitation was merely a formality.

Receiving the letter from the emperor and empress could already be considered an implicit acknowledgment of the succession, but the reason for still holding a ceremony was to announce to the world who had become the next duke. Yuder looked down at the invitation that had arrived for him. The special invitation, personally written by Myra, exuded a sense of being sent by the true master of the South. From the paper used to the ink and the fragrance sprinkled on it, anyone knowledgeable could tell that nothing had been chosen carelessly.

‘Given the series of significant events that have occurred recently, it seems she intends to prepare even more thoroughly. To show that the south has not crumbled despite experiencing such incidents,’ Yuder thought.

In fact, Yuder held not one but two invitations in his hand. Unlike the blue-colored succession ceremony invitation, the other one, made of black paper, was none other than a funeral notice. The funeral, scheduled to take place before the succession ceremony, was to be held at the same temple where the second son of Herne’s funeral had previously been conducted. The deceased were two individuals.

One was, of course, the former Duke of Herne, and the other… was the second son of Herne.

‘Everything about this is surprising,’ Yuder mused.

Firstly, the fact that they chose to hold the funeral at that temple, despite it being the place where Duke Herne had died and suffered the greatest damage on the day of the hailstorm, was unexpected. Secondly, the act of listing the names of the duke and the second son side by side as the deceased was noteworthy.

In a typical case, the name of the duke, who held a higher title and was the parent, would naturally be written above. Listing them side by side indicated an unwillingness to elevate the deceased duke's name to a great extent. Conversely, it also meant that the second son's existence was considered as important as the duke's.

'The answer is probably both,' Yuder concluded.

Although interrupted midway due to an unexpected accident, the funeral of the second son, Ashrav, had indeed taken place. So, they could have simply left it at that and buried him, and no one would have objected. However, Myra was determined to properly hold her brother's funeral once again. It was a bold choice that conveyed her firm resolve to definitively conclude her brother's funeral with this single ceremony, as well as how dishonorably she, the next Duke of Herne, regarded her father.

Kishiar, who also possessed both invitations like Yuder, had a smile forming on his lips. There was no way he hadn't understood the implied meaning that Yuder had discerned. Perhaps the man who had been waiting for this moment for a very long time wore a secretive, joyful, yet cold smile.

"The demise of the fox commander, who enjoyed hiding in the southern caves and tormenting everyone, is quite unsightly," Kishiar remarked.

Yuder, gazing at his smile, suddenly thought of a question. "Come to think of it, why was he called the fox commander?"

"In the southern part of the empire, near the desert, there's a creature called the silver sand fox. Do you happen to know what kind of habits it has?" Kishiar asked.

"I'm not very familiar," Yuder admitted.

The silver sand fox, which had its main habitat in the southern desert, was often used by southerners to metaphorically describe selfish individuals. The reason was that the silver sand fox would seize the burrows already dug by other animals and prey on the original owners. Even if they were of the

same species, if they belonged to a different pack, the silver sand foxes would mercilessly hunt them down.

The commander of a fox pack that was so ruthless as to prey on its own kind and was difficult to hunt once it hid.

Kishiar, having explained that much, smiled with curved eyes. “Doesn’t it suit him quite well?”

“Indeed, it does,” Yuder agreed.

Considering the things he had done to his own flesh and blood, it was a rather fitting nickname. Yuder, thinking that he could sufficiently imagine the kind of life the deceased Duke of Herne had lived while causing headaches for the imperial family, halfheartedly erased the face he had seen only once from his mind.

“Anyway, if we want to attend both ceremonies, we’ll be quite busy,” Kishiar said, putting down the letter as if he had never been busy before.

“The funeral and the succession ceremony. They will probably be the last events we can witness before leaving the south. I’m really looking forward to it. What about you, Assistant?”

“Yes, I’m looking forward to it as well,” Yuder replied.

The red eyes, now filled with a much warmer and pleasant light compared to earlier, swept over Yuder.

“You must have noticed the part that says it’s acceptable to bring a partner to the succession ceremony since it will be held alongside a party, right?” Kishiar asked.

“Yes,” Yuder confirmed.

“I’m so fortunate that I don’t need to worry about who to go with since I only have one person in mind now,” Kishiar remarked, blatantly hinting at the person right in front of him.

“…”

It was truly like him to say such things while smiling and expecting a response from the person he was directly addressing. Yuder opened his mouth and spoke to the man who was resting his chin on his hands, eagerly awaiting an answer.

“In that case, do you even need to bother reading that part?” Yuder asked.

If he always had only one partner to attend parties with, there was obviously no need to diligently read or pay attention to that particular section. Upon hearing the somewhat provocative statement uttered in an emotionless voice, the man was momentarily stunned before bursting into laughter and lowering his head.

“…You’re right. I unnecessarily read a part that I didn’t need to. I admit defeat,” Kishiar conceded.

“…”

“Then, shall we change our afternoon schedule to an outing for preparations?” Kishiar suggested.

Putting everything else aside, Yuder found the “preparation” part to be quite bothersome. However, knowing that Kishiar enjoyed preparing more than anyone else, Yuder nodded without hesitation.

“Yes, let’s prepare,” Yuder agreed.

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A few days later, on a clear day without a single cloud in the sky, a solemn funeral was held at the grand temple in Charloin.

In fact, people had thought that the funeral would be held elsewhere since the parts of the temple that had collapsed on the day of the hailstorm had not been fully repaired yet. However, the new master of Herne did not yield to such opinions and insisted on holding it there.

The reason could be understood through the faces of the southerners gathered outside for the funeral. Although many commoners had visited the place on the day of the hailstorm as well, the atmosphere this time was quite different from back then.

Unlike the gloomy weather and the sharp, unsettling atmosphere of that day, the people who had gathered this time seemed composed and had much brighter expressions, as if they had sorted out all their feelings. The sight of the flowers they offered piling up mostly under the name of the second son, Ashrav, or the signature of House Herne written by Myra, rather than the individual name of the deceased Duke of Herne, conveyed much to those who had followed the deceased Duke.

The people offering flowers had not come here to honor the deceased Duke of Herne. They had come for Myra, who had ultimately kept her word spoken in front of the southerners on the day of the hailstorm, and for the south that had overcome all difficulties.

The atmosphere of the ceremony held inside the temple was also quite different from before. The number of attendees was much smaller compared to the first funeral, and it was not as noisy as it had been then. It was said that the birth mother of the second son, Ashrav, had not attended at all, having immediately gathered her wealth and left far away after the death of Duke Herne.

A priest with a solemn face conducted the ceremony concisely, and the coffins of the deceased were carried away one by one, disappearing beneath the temple.

Honestly speaking, everyone knew that the eulogy prepared for the second son, Ashrav, was much longer and more sincere than the one for the late Duke of Herne, but no one objected to it. The death of Duke Herne was buried in a truly humble manner, not even worthy of being a mere accompaniment to his deceased son.

Myra, with a relieved smile hidden beneath the veil covering her face, greeted the mourners who had come all the way to the temple after concluding the funeral. She showed a particularly delighted demeanor when

meeting Kishiar and Yuder, not hiding her joy compared to when she faced others.

“Honestly, I sent the invitations, but I didn’t expect you to come all the way here,” Myra said.

“Oh, what a disappointing thing to say. We’ve been through so much together, of course we had to come,” Kishiar replied with a natural tone.

Myra smiled at Kishiar’s straightforward response. “Thank you. You will surely attend the upcoming succession ceremony as well and grace us with your presence, won’t you?”

“That goes without saying. We will definitely congratulate you on behalf of His Majesty,” Kishiar assured her.

After exchanging a few more words, they bid farewell. It was then that Myra mentioned her deceased father for the first and last time.

“Most children born in Herne die at a young age, so the duke has an obligation to leave behind as many children as possible. My father seemed to pity himself the most for being bound to that duty, but he never moved in a better direction despite that. I have no intention of living for such unimportant things,” Myra stated.

“Then, what do you consider important, First Princess?” Kishiar asked.

She answered quietly, but with sincerity, “The people I must protect and the South where they reside are important to me. Just as the Cavalry has taught me.”

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Chapter 991

“The people I must protect and the South where they reside are important to me. Just as the Cavalry has taught me.”

After saying that, Myra looked at Yuder and hesitated for a moment before speaking.

“…Baron Aile. When I heard the story of you staying underwater for over a day in the deep sea, I wondered several times how you could go to such lengths for the sake of others. I’m truly glad and grateful that you returned safely.”

“…”

“I will express my gratitude again at the succession ceremony, but it will feel more official there, as I will be representing the entire South. I wanted to say it now while I could still convey a more personal sentiment. I hope I haven’t been rude.”

As Yuder turned his head unintentionally, his eyes met Kishiar’s, who was smiling as if he had just heard the most delightful sound in the world. With a slightly flushed face, Yuder considered his response for a moment before answering Myra, who was waiting for his reply.

“No. I don’t think that day’s events warrant such gratitude, as it wasn’t solely my effort… But I’m satisfied that we were able to prevent a major disaster in the end.”

“You truly… think that way?”

Myra murmured in surprise, then soon smiled.

A moment later, she grasped the hem of her dress and bent her knee in a respectful manner, as one would when expressing reverence. It was a gesture that no one expected the soon-to-be Duchess to make towards

someone of a much lower status. Some southern nobles who were watching from afar were startled and began to whisper, but she paid them no mind.

“Of course, I will convey my gratitude to all the others who have worked hard for the South during the succession ceremony. So don’t worry about that. I, Myra El Herne, will never forget Baron Aile’s name and the Cavalry, and will remember them as eternal benefactors.”

Yuder suddenly recalled his previous life.

After the extent of the devastation in the South, which had been damaged beyond recovery due to the southern earthquake, became known, Empress Myra no longer even attempted to leave the Dawn Palace. Rumors had it that she had completely lost her mind, always wearing black mourning clothes and refusing to converse with anyone.

She was alive but no different from a corpse. It was a truly strange feeling to see someone who had been so lifeless then now vividly alive, thanking Yuder for saving the South.

It was a moment he was as certain as when he knew the earthquake would no longer occur. No. Perhaps even more so.

Why was that? Was it because he regretted not paying any attention to the person who could have turned out this way in his previous life?

“You seem to have been lost in thought ever since receiving the First Princess’s gratitude. Was there something bothering you?” Kishiar asked gently in the carriage on the way back to the branch.

“No. Rather than being bothered… I just remembered the past and felt strange.”

“The past, as in the previous game?”

“Yes.”

Even without elaborating, Kishiar, who had already heard about Myra from Yuder’s previous life, would have roughly guessed what Yuder was

thinking. He made a humming sound and soon smiled.

“I may not be a princess, so it’s difficult for me to say, but I roughly know how it feels to have someone remember me for a long time and change my life without my knowledge.”

Because Kishiar himself had experienced it too.

His red eyes seemed to say so.

“Even after learning about the end in the ‘previous’ life, that feeling hasn’t changed at all. If anything, I’ve become even more grateful.”

“…”

“So don’t find it strange or burdensome to receive words of gratitude. You truly deserve it for what you’ve done.”

Yuder leaned his head against the hand that embraced his shoulder, drawn by Kishiar’s words. As Kishiar said, he wasn’t Myra, so he couldn’t know for sure, but his heart felt much lighter anyway.

He decided that was enough.

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Finally, the day arrived when the new Duchess of Herne would hold the succession ceremony in front of everyone.

Originally, the main residence of the Herne family was located in the city of Hersha, close to the desert, but Myra decided to hold the ceremony not there, but at the villa in Charloin where she had been staying.

The gates of Charloin, which had been closed almost the entire time since the day of the hail and through the Blue Wall of Despair, were finally wide open. People who had been waiting all day after receiving invitations poured in one after another in their carriages.

“I thought the cleanup wouldn’t be finished yet… but I was wrong.”

“Look at the clothes of those guarding the gates. Aren’t they the Imperial Knights!”

“My goodness. It’s the first time I’ve seen a succession ceremony attended by the Imperial Knights.”

Everyone was surprised to see the members of the Imperial Palace Knights, who had come to help with security and the aftermath in Charloin, standing with solemn faces. No one knew how they had come all the way here, but the fact that the snobbish knights, who usually stayed only in the capital, were here had the effect of considerably quelling the anger of the southern nobles. Their splendid uniforms also became a great topic of conversation among the commoners.

The streets were filled with the symbols of the Herne family and the flags of the Orr Empire, and even the merchants offered their goods at a discount for this day only. Children clutching small cookies scattered by the Herne family to celebrate the day laughed and ran through the streets.

“Eternal blessings to the new Duchess of Herne!”

At the same time, several carriages bearing the Cavalry’s coat of arms arrived together in front of the villa where the succession ceremony would be held.

“The Cavalry has arrived!”

Amidst the murmuring, the door opened, and those dressed in white formal attire alighted one by one.

All eyes were drawn to them, but the members, who had already experienced the celebratory party held at the Imperial Palace, were no longer flustered by this level of attention. As they lined up leisurely but with discipline, someone tall emerged from among them.

Although it was an unfamiliar face, anyone from the Orr Empire could easily guess his identity upon seeing his distinctive red eyes, radiant golden hair, and appearance that violently captivated the gaze.

‘The Duke of Peletta has appeared.’

The moment he appeared, the murmuring ceased, and even the curious gazes lost their light. The long, dark green cloth wrapped around his arms in the old southern style, draped with folds trailing behind his formal attire, looked like a painting. The Imperial family’s emblem, the Duke of Peletta’s emblem, and the Cavalry Commander’s emblem adorning his chest harmonized beautifully, exuding a truly dignified air.

Those who had been secretly stealing glances at him, forgetting even their dignity, barely managed to open their mouths and murmur.

“My goodness… They said his appearance alone was unrivaled on the continent, and the rumors were not exaggerated…”

“Is appearance the only thing he can boast about? Isn’t he now the owner of the Divine Sword and a new swordmaster?”

“I can see the sword slightly hanging from his waist. Is that the Divine Sword Orr?”

Now, no one dared to openly say anything against the words praising the Duke of Peletta. It was because everyone here, all the southern people, knew that they had survived thanks to the new legend created by the Cavalry and the Duke of Peletta.

Kishiar La Orr was in the midst of a conversation with someone, wearing a beautiful smile as if he couldn’t hear any of those words. Just as those watching were getting curious about the interaction that seemed too intimate to be a conversation with a subordinate, the face of the person hidden behind the Duke’s tall stature and broad back was finally revealed.

“Oh…”

He was a man with neatly parted black hair, exuding a dignified presence. Despite standing next to someone so remarkably tall that it momentarily confused the sense of perspective, his posture was so uncannily upright that

he didn’t appear noticeably small. In fact, he was much taller than most of the men present at this occasion.

Looking at his dark, sunken eyes that were difficult to describe as simply black, and his cold, shadowed gaze, people felt an inexplicably strange sensation. Judging by his demeanor, which seemed very accustomed to such occasions, he appeared to be someone who would fit in at the highest positions even among the countless nobles here. Yet, when looking at his eyes, strangely, thoughts of dark, depraved back alleys reeking of blood came to mind.

Perhaps it was because of his pale skin despite the broad daylight, his lips with little color, and the black gloves covering both hands that further evoked such thoughts.

Someone else called out a name to the man wearing a formal attire almost identical to the Duke of Peletta’s, but with the accent colors replaced by black.

“Yuder!”

As he turned his head, the people who had been secretly observing him finally came to their senses and were startled.

“Yuder? Yuder Aile? The one who… went underwater for a whole day that time?”

“That person is Yuder Aile? Then…”

The expressions of some people who remembered the various embarrassing rumors that had circulated about him being involved with the Duke of Peletta turned strange. It was because the Yuder Aile they directly encountered was very different from the image they had vaguely imagined.

However, there weren’t many such people. There were far more people whispering that the hero who saved the South had arrived.

“Well then, let’s go in.”

Following the Duke of Peletta's instruction, all the members moved in perfect unison. As Yuder walked beside Kishiar, he heard the voices of those chattering around him.

"Look, that person is Ever Beck. The Cavalry's Deputy Commander! I heard a monument is being erected for her this time!"

"Then the ones next to her must be the other Deputy Commanders, right? I heard the Cavalry has three Deputy Commanders in total…"

"Gakane Bolunwald must have come today too, right?"

"Kurga Sing!"

"I wonder if Marin, the Awakener who created the forest, has come as well? There are so many people that it's hard to tell…"

Previously, most people looked at the Cavalry as a whole rather than focusing on individual members. At most, they showed interest in Kishiar individually, or in Yuder Aile after the events in the West.

It seemed similar this time, but upon closer observation, the atmosphere was definitely different from before. Regardless of their status, people flocked to the Cavalry members as they proceeded, pretending to know them a little or even calling out their names. Considering that most of them were nobles, it was truly a remarkable sight.

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Chapter 992

The servants of House Herne, numbering in the dozens, who had received the notice of the Cavalry's visit, guided them with a disciplined and polite attitude. "We sincerely welcome the esteemed guests from the Cavalry. We will do our utmost to serve you without the slightest inconvenience."

Surprisingly, these servants had been specifically chosen to serve only the Cavalry, and they had already memorized the faces and names of all the Cavalry members visiting today.

The Cavalry members who followed them were astonished to learn that a separate, large resting room had been prepared for them to wait and rest before the succession ceremony. Inside, there were plenty of delicious foods that could be eaten comfortably, and soft chairs that allowed them to rest without disturbing their formal attire. Books to read and game cards were provided as a bonus while they passed the time. The faces of the members, who were lying down and resting while chatting in a place where pleasant music flowed, were flushed with excitement.

"Wow… What is this? Is this how a ducal house's succession ceremony usually is?"

"Of course not. It's just that the new Duchess of House Herne thinks so highly of us."

"Am I really allowed to eat this?"

"Eat as much as you want. I asked a servant earlier, and they said they could bring any food that's not here if we just ask."

"What if we spill something?"

"Don't worry about it. They've even prepared magic tools that can quickly remove stains."

“Really? I’ve only heard about such things, but I’ve never actually seen them being used…”

The other guests were also receiving sufficiently good treatment, but the treatment towards the Cavalry was on a completely different level. Providing such a level of hospitality to so many people at once, which would normally only be given to guests from other ducal houses or the imperial family, was a first in the long history of the Herne Ducal House. The treatment openly displayed that they were the most esteemed guests, to the extent that there were even nobles who glanced from afar and envied them.

However, unlike those who envied them but couldn’t approach due to lack of acquaintance or pride, people who had previously established connections with the Cavalry confidently approached and struck up conversations.

“Wow. So this is the Cavalry’s resting room? I thought the place prepared for our allied troops was impressive… but this is much more spacious.”

“The difference in the number of people is huge, so it’s only natural, Sunz.”

“I know that too. I’m just saying.”

“No, but how can everyone look so different just by changing their attire? I thought I had come to the wrong place!”

Sunz and Emon, who had received personal invitations to the succession ceremony just like the Cavalry, entered the resting room and expressed their honest admiration. The Cavalry members also had donned formal wear, altering their usual atmosphere, but in truth, they were equally unmatched in that regard.

The two, who rarely wore their imperial army uniforms, had neatly styled hair with crisp hats, and even wore unfamiliar medals on their chests. Although Sunz was still wearing an eyepatch over one eye due to the aftereffects of overusing his power, it didn’t seem to cause him any discomfort. With infinitely bright expressions, they joked around and

exchanged banter with the Cavalry members they had become close to, saying they couldn’t recognize each other. Then, they walked over to find Yuder.

“Yuder. We thought we should greet you before the ceremony starts, so we came… but…”

“…”

Sunz and Emon, who had been looking for Yuder but first encountered Kishiar standing in front of him, simultaneously closed their mouths. They thought they had become quite accustomed to the face of the Duke of Peletta after frequently meeting him in the south recently, but they were completely wrong.

The simple-minded soldiers, who had become dazed without immunity in front of the tremendous appearance, forgetting the fact that they had been about to speak, only came to their senses when they heard Yuder’s voice, which was as emotionless as usual.

“Sunz, Emon.”

“Ah! S-sorry.”

“We were being rude…! We apologize, Commander of the Cavalry.”

As Sunz and Emon reflexively bowed their heads in apology, the Duke of Peletta responded gently.

“Hm? No, it’s fine. Everyone does that, so don’t be too embarrassed. Who would scold someone for having their gaze stolen by a beautiful flower without realizing it?”

If anyone else had said those words, they would have laughed at the absurdity, but when the Duke of Peletta calmly said them, it sounded like he was just saying something obvious in a slightly humorous way.

‘He’s truly terrifying…’

Sunz and Emon hurriedly turned their heads to find Yuder. And they were surprised again, but in a different sense.

“Uh… uhh.”

“What is it?”

“It’s you, Yuder… right?”

“Was there anyone else you could have mistaken me for?”

“No… there isn’t such a person.”

On the day of the hailstorm, they had seen Yuder wearing formal attire for attending a funeral. However, before they could properly look at his appearance, tremendous incidents kept occurring, and ultimately, the image of Yuder that remained in their memories was one where he was covered in blood from head to toe, looking like he could collapse and die at any moment.

Therefore, the sight of Yuder in good condition today gave Sunz and Emon a big shock, in a good way.

“My goodness, Yuder. I came here thinking I wasn’t too bad myself while wearing this uniform today, but I’m embarrassed to the point of shame. You look so cool.”

“Oh. It was only this guy who dared to think like that. The rest of us didn’t think anything at all.”

Emon added in a cynical voice to Sunz’s words. Sunz, who had become embarrassed, unhesitatingly poked Emon’s back with the edge of his hand. Although it looked like he was poking very lightly, in fact, he had slightly used his ability to see through things, so it was a terrifying attack that mercilessly dug into vital points.

“Be quiet.”

“Ugh, are you going to keep using your ability like that? Anyway, it’s a relief to see you looking well, Yuder. We heard you were fine, but we still wanted to confirm it with our own eyes. We’re close enough to come and check on that, aren’t we?”

Yuder looked into the eyes of the two, which were filled with even more intense goodwill, intimacy, and the unique trust of those who had overcome hardships together. Then, he slowly nodded.

“Yes. I’m perfectly fine. I’m glad to see that both of you don’t seem to be in bad condition either.”

Joy clearly spread across the faces of Sunz and Emon upon hearing Yuder’s affirmation.

“As for us, well, we recovered a long time ago. Hehe.”

“Except for Sunz’s eye. We have to make the weakest one among us the leader, so we’re going through a lot of trouble… Ack!”

Emon finally managed to add a remark but received another vital point attack from Sunz. It was a small incident, but nothing major. They made a point to ask Yuder to meet them separately before leaving the South, and then they left.

After that, many people continuously came to greet them. The officials and mage union members whom Yuder had met on his first day in the south, as well as the people from the merchant associations, were so polite that it was impossible to recall their attitudes from their first meeting. There were nobles who mustered up the courage to introduce themselves to Kishiar, and there were also people from the pro-emperor faction who had consistently worked for the emperor in the south, although they had no direct acquaintance.

The last person to enter the Cavalry’s resting room almost right before the ceremony began was General Gino Bordelli, who was being supported by Meghna Kurlieva.

“Greetings, Commander of the Cavalry.”

“General. I haven’t heard anything about you being injured?”

“Haha. It wasn’t severe enough to mention.”

As Kishiar frowned and looked at Meghna, Meghna, who had greeted him, calmly explained.

“The general single-handedly dealt with all the traitorous monsters that tried to invade the southern army’s main camp around the time the last wave receded, and since then, he has been suffering from a cold. He has mostly recovered now, but he still occasionally feels dizzy, so I humbly requested to support him with my meager strength.”

“So even though I said it wasn’t necessary… My disciple worries too much, it’s troublesome.”

The old general smiled bitterly and shook his head. Kishiar, who had briefly scanned the general’s entire body, slowly nodded and smiled.

“I see… It’s a relief that it’s nothing serious. However, Adjutant Kurlieva’s concern seems valid, so don’t refuse her request until she feels at ease. I’m saying this not only as another disciple who learned the sword from you but also as the one beside you.”

“How could I refuse if you put it that way? Sigh. You’re all really too much.”

The old general, who had shaken his head with a sigh, looked at Yuder standing next to Kishiar and smiled softly.

“Yuder. I wanted to tell you that your advice was a great help, and here we meet like this. I heard you did a tremendous job this time. I was really worried because I wanted to help but couldn’t, but seeing you healthy is truly a relief.”

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Chapter 993

General Gino Bordelli was respected for many reasons, but one of them was his ability to not openly display personal connections or feelings in public settings. He would exceptionally show a friendly attitude and laughter to Kishiar, who was of imperial blood and he had taught sword in his youth, but even that was closer to the appearance of an old retainer, as he claimed to be.

Meghna, who had been the general's disciple and closest aide for a long time, had never witnessed the old general being so openly intimate with a young person like this before. While Meghna tried to hide her inner surprise, Yuder casually nodded and replied.

"I heard you dug up the sweet potatoes well. I'm glad it was helpful to you, General."

'Sweet potatoes?'

The expressions of those who were secretly listening in to hear what Yuder had said to the general turned strange, but the general just laughed heartily.

"Yes. You were right. You said that sweet potatoes are connected by roots, so if you find one, you can follow the rest and sweep them up. It was indeed a very rewarding time. Next time, I'd like to ask for your advice on how to manage the dug-up sweet potatoes or how to plow the field, if that's alright with you?"

"The Cavalry won't be leaving right after today, so before that should be fine."

Even though a figure as great as General Gino was asking for advice, the young man answered with an expressionless face, arrogantly considering his own schedule without even making time for it. The nobles watching from afar thought the general would get angry at this arrogant young Awakener, but that didn't happen.

“Great. Very good. I’d like to see that sparring match with Meghna as I mentioned before, and spend a pleasant time discussing swords. Ah, do you happen to like strategy games?”

“I know how to play.”

“Perfect! I’ll send word soon.”

General Gino, genuinely delighted like a young man who didn’t need to consider dignity or face, patted Yuder’s shoulder. If someone didn’t know the age difference and positions of the two, they might have mistaken it for a conversation between old friends meeting after a long time, given the uninhibited attitude. Both those who respected the general and those who didn’t were all surprised.

The general must have clearly felt the emotions of those around him, but he didn’t mind. With a satisfied face, he greeted Kishiar.

“Then I’ll take my leave first. I apologize for leaving right after meeting you, but it seems we’ll have to return immediately after the succession ceremony, so I’ll have to bid farewell here today.”

“Oh, that’s a shame. I understand. I’ll send word again later.”

The old general withdrew with his disciple supporting him. When they were far enough away that no one was paying attention to them, he suddenly smiled and asked in a low voice.

“Meghna. Did my behavior just now seem strange?”

After a moment of silence, Meghna shook her head.

“Honestly, I was surprised… but I didn’t find it strange. I haven’t forgotten the great help Baron Aile provided to our Southern Army this time, so how could you, General?”

The general nodded at Meghna’s answer.

“Yes. Age is something that everyone gains just by sleeping and waking up, and status is something you’re born with, but it can change at any time and isn’t eternal. So don’t judge people solely based on those things. I hope you won’t experience the same regrets I did by unknowingly becoming accustomed to judging the world by familiar standards.”

Meghna, who knew that the old general had recently captured another disciple he had personally raised and made it so he could never use a sword again, putting him in prison, took those words very heavily. The old general sincerely advised Meghna, who had pressed her lips together without a word.

“Don’t forget that a world that cannot be predicted by existing standards is already before our eyes. They are the proof of that. Make sure to watch closely with your own eyes how a world that seemed like it would never change is changing. And learn from it.”

Because only by learning from those who lead change can we also change the world.

To that single statement, which contained both the old general’s long-held regrets and hopes, Meghna could only give one answer.

“I will keep that in mind.”

Finally, the official succession ceremony for the new Duchess of Herne began.

Amidst the overflowing seats filled with numerous southern dignitaries and guests from various regions, Myra appeared, dressed in a dignified ceremonial attire. In her hand, she held the spear, the most famous symbol of the Herne ducal family.

The spear, longer than Myra’s height, looked so heavy that one might wonder if it could even be lifted, but she walked to the front of the platform without changing her expression while holding it.

“That’s Tollenebaragul, the legendary weapon used by the first Duke of Herne. There’s a famous story about how he defeated countless enemies on ships with that. That’s why the symbol of the Herne family is still a winged spear piercing four waves.”

Yuder heard Gakane whispering explanations to Kanna and the other members behind him. As he said, the jewel depicting a winged spear piercing waves was brilliantly embedded at the junction of the spear’s blade and shaft.

On the platform, there was a priest who would recite the blessing for the new Duchess who would become the master of Herne. That person was none other than Priestess Galleum, who had long been associated with Myra.

The priestess, who was not well-known as she didn’t reside in a large temple and wasn’t of noble birth, became one of the most recognized priests in the south after going through the Day of Hail and the Blue Wall of Despair. Myra personally requested her to bless her future path, bypassing the existing famous priests.

“Life is like the land facing the waves. Endless waves will come crashing in, trying to destroy and violate the earth. However, if the land we stand on is firm, God will always shine the light of peace upon our earth and grant us tranquility.”

The priestess’ calm voice, clearly chosen for today, resounded sacredly throughout the large hall. Everyone was newly moved, thinking of the time when towering waves endlessly rushed in, and the fact that they had finally overcome it and reached today.

“God, bless the Duchess who will embark on a new voyage towards a distant path.”

With those final words, the priestess closed the scripture and placed her hand on Myra’s head, emitting divine power. After a warm light flowed out, Myra raised her head and stood confidently in front of everyone.

The hand holding the spear slowly rose and then fell, striking the floor.

Thud.

And then again, thud. Thud. The sound and vibration of the spear continuously striking the floor resonated through the space. There were no words, but that was enough. As the sound continued, everyone could clearly feel the will and ambition of the new Duchess of Herne, who held the heavy legendary spear without the slightest tremor.

It was a sound that unmistakably united everyone more than any speech could.

The moment the final twelfth strike was made, a solemn sound rang out from the bell tower of Charloin in the distance, celebrating the succession of the new Duchess of Herne.

Everyone who had been in a daze finally stood up from their seats and applauded all at once. The slowly rising cheers grew loud enough to drown out the bell sound, filling the entire hall.

“Wow!”

“Long live the Duchess of Herne!”

Yuder, who had been applauding for Myra, suddenly glanced up at the man beside him.

Even though it was evident that the lavishness had been deliberately toned down given the timing, the succession ceremony of the Duchess of Herne was solemn and beautiful enough to be more than sufficient just by adhering to tradition. But had every duke been like that?

Kishiar also held the title of duke, but he wouldn’t have had a proper succession ceremony. The situation of a prince becoming a duke and being exiled was not something to celebrate. Without a tradition to follow or even a previous duke like Myra had, it would have been impossible to prepare a ceremony like this even if he wanted to.

The name of the ‘Peletta Ducal Family’ existed for him and him alone in the world.

As Yuder was thinking about the young prince in the portrait who had headed to the far north as soon as he received the title, Kishiar, who had been elegantly applauding with a smile, turned his head and met Yuder’s eyes.

“Hm? Do you have something to say?”

“…No. It’s nothing.”

As Yuder turned his head away, Kishiar laughed softly.

“I did have a succession ceremony, albeit a simple one. Before I left the Imperial Palace.”

He had already figured out why Yuder had been looking at him.

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Chapter 994

He had already figured out why Yuder had been looking at him.

“…”

“It wasn’t as grand as this, but it wasn’t as bad as I thought. The atmosphere was cozy with only a small number of family members and witnesses participating. I received a seal ring engraved with a phrase I personally created, had a meal, and after that night passed, I went to Peletta by dawn.”

Kishiar’s voice was very soft. Everyone was excited and cheering, so no one paid attention to the two of them.

However, to Yuder, his low murmur sounded louder than any shout.

“Considering the essence of what a celebration is, it was a decent succession ceremony.”

He knew those words were sincere. But he also knew how much time had to pass for the man to be able to say that so calmly.

Yuder nodded, looking at the man’s lips that seemed to be smiling.

“…I see.”

The applause ended. Myra stuck the spear of the First Duke of Herne at the top of the podium and turned around. The first thing the new Duchess of Herne did was none other than directly greeting the precious guests who had saved the South.

“As everyone here already knows, a terrible thing happened in the South not long ago. We almost lost this precious land and people of the South. Expressing gratitude to the heroes who risked their lives to help us escape that crisis is the first thing I must do as the lord of Herne.”

Her way of speaking was different from when she was a princess.

Myra, who declared in a solemn voice, bowed her head in gratitude to the Cavalry, Imperial Army, and security forces sitting in the front row, as well as all those who had worked hard on the day of hail and the day the blue wall of despair reached them.

“Herne, and all the people of the South, will never forget the names and spirit of the heroes who have worked for us.”

Yuder recalled Myra’s face that he had met at the funeral not long ago. She had said to Yuder in almost the same way as now that she “won’t forget.” Those words, delivered once personally and once again publicly in front of everyone, felt heavier to Yuder than any expression of gratitude.

Perhaps it was because he had learned a little through Kishiar what it could mean for someone to remember him for a long time.

Those who had been still for a moment applauded again in unison. The faces of the Cavalry members looking around were flushed and very red. Myra slowly descended from the podium after enough time had passed for them to receive applause.

The servants lined up below the podium followed her as if they had been waiting. Yuder noticed that they were each carrying a large box. The place where Myra stopped, leading the servants, was none other than in front of Kishiar and Yuder.

“Cavalry Commander, and Commander’s Assistant, Baron Aile. Please accept this token of gratitude for the heroes who risked themselves in the most dangerous places more than anyone else.”

“…”

For a moment, the cheers of the people suddenly became wildly intense. As if they had been waiting for this moment, Yuder felt a little perplexed by the tremendously amplified applause.

“Cavalry!”

“Heroes of the South!”

“The swordmaster revered by the Divine Sword!”

‘…Why are they applauding like that… Besides, why suddenly receive something like this?’

While Yuder was pondering what to do, Myra smiled slightly and personally received the box from the servant and opened it so that everyone could see.

Inside was not expensive jewels or silk, nor treasures like magic tools of equivalent value. It was just a single cloudy and translucent lump of stone.

“This is a crystal that came from the corpses of the monsters that the heroes defeated on the day when countless monsters rushed in amidst the towering waves. The crystals that come out after burning the corpses of monsters are very sturdy and make good tools when processed into anything, and it is said that carrying them becomes an amulet of victory.”

Only then did the image of those transparent monsters they had defeated to the point of exhaustion come to Yuder’s mind. It seemed that the crystals formed by burning and solidifying those terribly mixed-up body parts.

“The seal of the Herne family has been engraved on that crystal. The hero who possesses it will forever be treated as the most precious guest in the South and will become a benefactor of Herne, which I swear at this place.”

All the other servants behind Myra also opened their boxes. The boxes they were holding also contained countless crystals of similar appearance.

‘That means… she’s making that promise not only to me but to everyone who has contributed this time. It’s incredible.’

It wasn’t an expensive item, but the meaning contained within it was more valuable than anything else. Who in this world could receive such a promise

from Herne, a member of the four ducal families, in the South, which was notoriously exclusive?

Those with great responsibility do not make reckless assertions or promises. The fact that this was the first thing Myra did as a Duchess, knowing the weight of it better than anyone else, made them feel the magnitude of her gratitude and the clear direction in which Herne would move forward.

Amidst the applause of the people, Kishiar was the first to smile and accept the crystal.

“To think I would receive such a precious item.”

“…”

“As the Commander representing the Cavalry, I promise that our Cavalry will always be the first to rush in and become a breakwater to block the waves whenever danger strikes the South, even without this emblem.”

“Wow!”

Yuder stood up following Kishiar amidst the deafening cheers and received one of the crystals from the box Myra offered.

As monsters were his weakness, he had never tried to get close to the byproducts made from monsters either. However, this small crystal he picked up now didn’t feel so unpleasant.

He bowed his head to Myra and to those who were cheering. As if they expected him to say something grand like Kishiar, the people suddenly became quiet.

But Yuder had no intention of living up to their expectations.

After taking the crystal, he said just one thing.

“I will cherish it well.”

Then, as soon as he closed his mouth, the people who had been waiting for something blinked in unison. It was as if they were asking if that was really the end.

‘Yes, that’s all.’

It was enough for Kishiar to say the good words. There was no need for him, who was no longer a commander, to unnecessarily add useless words, and he had no desire to do so either.

“Hahaha!”

Amidst the awkward murmurs, someone suddenly laughed loudly. It was none other than General Gino, who was sitting right next to them.

“The one who has done the most work and shed the most blood is the least greedy of all. Indeed, it is the aspiration of a hero. At this age, I learn yet another thing from a young man. What a wonderful day!”

As he smiled and applauded, people finally began to applaud one by one as if drawn to it.

While people were at a loss, Myra, who had been watching Yuder unwaveringly as if she had expected him to do so, also casually extended her hand and shook hands with him.

Following that, Myra personally called out the names of all those who attended today’s event and presented them with crystals. It took a long time, but no one left their seats. They felt that the unusually short succession ceremony was for this very purpose.

After presenting crystals to everyone, Myra declared that the ceremony was over.

“From now on, the party will continue, so please move to the hall next door and enjoy a delightful time to your heart’s content.”

As if they had been waiting, the music began. Kishiar stood up from his seat and extended his hand to Yuder.

“The moment I’ve been looking forward to the most has arrived. Of course, you’ll grant me the first dance, won’t you?”

A playful wink accompanied his offer, overlaying the memory of the moment Yuder had taken his hand at the palace party. Yuder reached out his hand without hesitation and grasped the man’s fingers more firmly than that time.

“Yes.”

The people of the South, who had only heard rumors about the scene, widened their eyes. The Cavalry members looked at the sight with faces that seemed similar yet different from the imperial palace party, filled with various thoughts.

They all remembered the words the Commander had said before going to the imperial palace party. However, there was definitely a slight difference between then, when surprise was the primary reaction for everyone, and now. Even if they couldn’t clearly explain in words what had changed, it was certainly different.

Murmurs poured out behind them, but no one ended up openly saying anything to them. Myra, the protagonist of today’s event, was the same.

Yuder followed the hand that elegantly held and led him, passing through the wide-open door.

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Chapter 995

Yuder followed the hand that elegantly held and led him, passing through the wide-open door.

The grand melody of the Rancha dance resounded loudly. It was natural, as it was different from the imperial palace party where Kishiar had the privilege to choose the music first. Although it was a completely different dance tune from the Avitan, which was originally danced by the commoner, Yuder was not perplexed or concerned. He placed his hand against Kishiar's as he was pulled, turning his body in the opposite direction and standing.

The basic posture of the Rancha was slightly different, but anyone could see that Kishiar was taking the female steps. The sound of people simultaneously holding their breath could be heard from around them.

"Oh my…!"

Regardless, Kishiar was confident as always. As soon as the music started, his footsteps were filled with certainty. Despite being surprisingly tall, his movements were so astonishingly smooth that there was no awkwardness at all. If one only looked at Kishiar without paying attention to the others around them, it would seem as if the dance was created to be performed that way from the beginning.

'Thanks to him, it's fortunate that it's not noticeable that I've forgotten more than half of this dance.'

Yuder recalled the man's words before coming here, whispering to leave it to him no matter what dance tune came out. The Avitan practiced in the capital was still vivid in his memory, but not the Rancha. There was no time to practice separately and get used to it again like before, and in the first place, he only knew the male dance steps, so he had been hesitant, but it was truly a needless worry.

When dancing with someone who had reached mastery, even if one was somewhat clumsy, it would not appear that way at all. Realizing this fact firsthand was truly magical.

‘Not actual magic, but it’s something quite similar…’

Others might not know, but Yuder sensitively felt the invisible, faint force surrounding their bodies. The owner of that force was naturally Kishiar. While fully utilizing his physical abilities and dance skills to lead Yuder, he was also using his Awakener ability in case it couldn’t be done with just that.

The force surrounding them pushed Yuder’s back a little faster whenever he slightly missed the beat, and sometimes, mysteriously, it pulled his arms and legs to distribute his weight. If he hadn’t been seeing it with his own eyes, he probably wouldn’t have believed that someone could use their ability so delicately to dance together.

Thanks to that, Yuder could focus only on the hand leading him and the smiling face without worrying about anything, which was simply comfortable for him.

“The advantage and disadvantage of the Rancha is that there is almost no moment when the body touches except for the hands. It’s a dance that makes you enjoy the moment of harmonizing with many people while keeping a certain distance. If you say it nicely, it’s modest, and if you say it badly, it’s not much different from combining solo dances into a group dance.”

The man leaned in close and whispered softly.

“But there is definitely a joy in this that you can’t feel in other dances. The moment of perfectly harmonizing with your partner, savoring the changing body temperature when switching the touching hands, and the moment of briefly talking like this.”

“…I see.”

“When you’re too close, it’s rather difficult to observe properly, so it’s nice to be able to see some parts more overall and leisurely. Like how perfect the outfit my partner is wearing today, and how beautiful the ankles slightly revealed thanks to the short shoes.”

Whenever he whispered, Yuder felt the red gaze sweeping over the mentioned parts. The eyes that had followed the black cloth wrapped around his arms and the tail of his cloak now trailed down to the slightly exposed ankle above his shoes.

The moment it lingered on the ankles slightly revealed above the shoes, a tingling sensation ran through the skin at that spot.

As if appreciating something beautiful, but hidden within it was a secret sensuality that only Yuder would know. Perhaps because they were not closely attached, as he said, it seemed to make the feeling a bit strange.

When Yuder slightly frowned to swallow that secret anxiety, the man laughed softly. As they switched the touching hands according to the music and spun around, he bowed his head and spoke again.

“Looking around while spinning, it seems everyone is curious about what we’re talking about. Did you see?”

“Not really… I’m not interested.”

He could feel that much without looking. After all, he had expected to receive more attention than necessary when stepping out to such an occasion, so it wasn’t surprising.

“Even though there seem to be many people admiring the beauty of Baron Yuder Aile, who has become the hero of the South following the West, and contemplating whether to request the next dance?”

“I’m even less interested in that.”

Yuder looked up at Kishiar with a blank expression and opened his mouth.

“No matter what others say, what’s more important to me now is the present. So, Commander, if you have time to joke around looking elsewhere, you should look more this way until the dance is over. I can see that you dance better than me, but you seem too relaxed.”

Kishiar’s eyes widened. After a moment, his red eyes sparkled with joy, and a big laugh burst out.

“…Oh my. I’m ashamed to have made my precious partner think that way. Alright. From now on, I swear I will never look anywhere else and will only look at one person more than now.”

The dark green cloth wrapped around Kishiar’s arm fluttered as beautifully as his laughter. Under the light of the crystal chandelier, the brightly shining man looked like a gem carved out of a single piece.

Yuder focused on the dance, quite satisfied with that sight. Even though he didn’t enjoy dancing, he felt a strange desire to keep watching Kishiar dance like this if possible. If he could continue to see that figure up close, completely focused only on this side as promised, Yuder felt he could gladly spend his time this way.

The instrument’s melody, which had risen greatly, gradually thinned out as it approached the end. As the last movement of spinning around with one hand raised high against each other slowly ceased, Kishiar slightly bent the touching hand and intertwined his fingers with Yuder’s. Naturally, looking at the intertwined fingers, a low whisper was heard.

“It was the most enjoyable. To the point where I thought I had spent all those days for this very moment.”

“Thanks to you… I’m glad I finished well without many mistakes.”

“That must mean my partner also enjoyed it without worry, right?”

The man winked and looked around, then lowered his head to Yuder’s ear and asked very softly.

“So… may I ask who you’ll dance with next?”

“…”

“Damn it.”

“Pardon?”

“Not you.”

By the wall far from the dancing people.

Enon, who was standing where a long table with simple food and snacks was set up, suddenly cursed thickly. Lusan, who was startled, was a little relieved that it wasn’t directed at him, but soon, filled with curiosity, he raised his head.

“What are you looking at? Ah. You were watching the dancing people.”

“…”

As the dance tune ended, people dispersed. Among them, Enon cursed again, looking at the two particularly eye-catching tall men.

“It’s a mess. A complete mess.”

Naturally, those two men were the Commander and his Assistant.

“Hahaha. Is it because of Yuder?”

“…”

“Hmm… Well, you said you knew Yuder from before, so it’s understandable that you’d be a bit worried. I was also unsure at first if it would be okay.”

Lusan heard that Kishiar had been working to make the Awakeners’ second gender naturally accepted by the world through parties and dances since the capital. When he first saw the two of them dancing at the imperial palace

party, despite knowing that fact, he felt restless and anxious, but today, unlike then, he watched them quite comfortably.

It might be because he had seen it twice and had gotten a bit used to it, but on the other hand…

“But this time, I could feel that they were really focused on each other, so rather than feeling strange, should I say it looked somewhat natural…”

“Who said what?”

Enon grumbled.

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Chapter 996

The majority of the Cavalry members were not well-versed in dancing the Rancha, so unlike the Imperial Palace party, only a few participated in the dance. Although it was an invitation they received after achieving great feats, there was no atmosphere of disrespect for not dancing. At this rate, the only thing people would remember from today's party would be the dance of the Cavalry Commander, Duke Peletta, and his Assistant.

A peculiar relationship where they were both men, yet simultaneously of different second genders. If Kishiar had planned to leave an impression of the still unfamiliar existence of the second gender in the minds of the southern people, this dance could be considered quite successful.

Among the few people dancing the Rancha were the two individuals who had made the greatest contributions in this battle. How could anyone not watch the combination of these two?

'Anyway… it seems today's party will mainly be about eating and chatting,' Lusan thought with a relaxed smile. It was at that moment when slightly noisy voices suddenly came from not too far away.

'What is it this time?' Lusan's expression turned serious as he turned his head.

'That's…' In the corner of the party hall, in a spot not easily noticeable, a group of distinctly vivid red hair had gathered. Among them, one person with a tall stature was Gakane Bolunwald, whom Lusan knew well.

A Cavalry member from a southern noble family, often called the face of the Cavalry for his striking good looks. He was currently standing with his back to the people with red hair resembling his own, as if protecting them, confronting someone.

"After leaving your hometown and rising in the world, it seems you've lost sight of things, Gakane!" The person standing in front of Gakane taunted.

Gakane frowned and stared at the face of the person in front of him. “You know it’s best not to raise your voice on a good day like today, don’t you?”

“…” “Brother…” “Big brother…” His younger siblings mumbled softly behind his back, frightened by the sneering voice.

“It’s alright. Giten. Gaila. Come here…” His parents, equally anxious, called out to the younger siblings, trying their best to maintain composure.

‘Why… did this happen again?’ Gakane sighed and thought about what had happened today.

As his opponent said, today was an exceptionally joyous day. As a member of the Cavalry, he had been invited to attend the succession ceremony of Duke Herne and was recognized for his achievements, receiving a monster crystal engraved with the Herne family’s coat of arms.

It felt similar to the award he had received at the Imperial Palace after completing the mission in the West, so it was fine up to that point. The problem was that this was his hometown in the south.

“Gakane!”

“Oh, Mother. Father? Even the younger siblings… What’s going on?”

“We were also invited, of course. Hoho. Surprised?”

When his family from Ulan called out to him after the succession ceremony, as he was about to head to the party hall, Gakane was quite surprised but simultaneously felt joy. Yuder had previously mentioned that it would be good to prepare for Gakane’s family to come to Charloin at any time, and it seemed he had really kept his word and pulled some strings to get them invited separately.

The Bolunwald family members, invited by both the Cavalry Commander and the Herne family, rode the finest carriage to Charloin and stayed in accommodations even better than their own home.

“You have no idea how much people on the streets are talking about you. We all heard about the great things you did this time. We’re so proud of you, Gakane.”

“I always regretted not being able to support you when you said you wanted to become a knight… But you’ve achieved your dream splendidly. Thank you, God.”

His father’s eyes reddened as he patted Gakane’s back. His mother also held Gakane’s hand and offered a short prayer of gratitude. Feeling touched, Gakane briefly embraced his parents before letting go. Seeing his usually noisy younger siblings unusually quiet, he burst into laughter.

“Could it be that these kids are overwhelmed after coming to Charloin?”

“Haha. When have the children ever been to a place like this? They’ve been out of it since entering Charloin, and they’ve been like this ever since coming here. I’m worried they might get lost.”

Gakane understood that feeling. He had felt something similar when he first left Ulan and reached the capital. However, despite being from a noble family, he had no money at the time and had to find the most run-down inn to stay in, so he felt more exhaustion than admiration.

Meeting Yuder there and reaching this point, it had become a very good memory in retrospect, but at the time, he had mixed feelings.

Gakane brightly smiled and gathered his younger siblings.

“After the party, let’s go to the Cavalry’s southern branch together. I’ll introduce you to my friends! They’ll all love you. Especially Yuder and Kanna…”

“Oh, Gakane Bolunwald. Long time no see?”

It was at that moment. Someone called out to Gakane from behind.

Turning his head, Gakane saw someone he had known long ago when he dreamed of becoming a knight. He was a noble of similar age to Gakane

and, as was common for children of lower nobles aspiring to become knights, had been part of a knightly order from a young age.

It was common knowledge that to become a knight, one had to first become a squire of a knight belonging to a knightly order. Only after dedicating oneself to a senior knight and mentor for several years could one be recognized and officially appointed as a real knight. However, the problem was that becoming a squire was more influenced by family name and money than swordsmanship talent or hard work.

He always mocked Gakane, who lacked both money and talent and awkwardly stuck around the knightly order without becoming anyone's squire. His mocking voice, asking who would accept a poor pretty boy like Gakane as a squire rather than having him do menial tasks, roll around, and get beaten up by senior knights as a punching bag, often made Gakane feel more depressed.

Now, it seemed he had become a knight, wearing a proper symbol of belonging to a knightly order on his chest.

"You disappeared for a while, rumored to be marrying a commoner, and I wondered where you went. I heard you became part of the Cavalry?"

"…"

"You used to cry and clean up my horse dung, saying you wanted to become a knight… You've risen quite high."

Indeed. Gakane laughed bitterly to himself.

He had already prepared himself for the possibility of encountering such fellows while coming to his hometown in the south. However, hearing such words while with his family still hurt and angered him a bit.

"Gakane…"

"He's someone you don't know well, so don't look at him and just go. I'm fine."

Gakane smiled and gestured to his anxious family. They turned around and entered the party hall. However, the other person followed and grabbed Gakane's arm.

"Where are you running off to?"

"Running? Why would I? Isn't it more strange to keep facing someone with whom I have nothing to talk about?"

The person who grabbed Gakane's arm flinched at the voice that was so cold it surprised even Gakane himself. Gakane took advantage of that moment to lightly shake off the other person's hand and gently brush his arm.

"You…!"

"What do you want, chasing after me like this?"

The other person's eyes blinked in confusion, clearly visible to Gakane. He seemed surprised that Gakane wasn't reacting as he wanted.

In the past, it would have been difficult for Gakane to calmly discern and respond to such hostility. But now, Gakane could see through the other person's ill will and mediocre skills with utmost clarity.

It was all thanks to the time he spent in the Cavalry.

The monsters and enemies he had faced so far were far more terrifying and powerful than this fellow. Someone who had never properly faced a monster in his life could no longer hurt Gakane in the slightest.

The flustered opponent regained his composure after seeing Gakane's parents behind him.

"Money."

"Money?"

“You have to pay back the money. Remember when you broke my sword and ran away? You should pay for it, even now.”

Thinking back, Gakane recalled a memory of fighting with that fellow just before quitting the knightly order. Of course, it was that fellow who had picked a fight and attacked first, and it was also that fellow who accidentally struck his sword against a hard rock, chipping and cracking it. Gakane had merely tried to avoid the fight to follow the knightly order’s rules against internal conflicts, but he still received punishment for it, and his chances of becoming a squire became slim. That incident was the decisive trigger for Gakane to completely leave that knightly order.

It was truly upsetting at the time, but thinking about it now, it was simply ridiculous.

Gakane looked at him and spoke.

“Money? I don’t mind giving it. I have that much money now. But… why should I give it to you?”

“What?”

“I didn’t break it. I didn’t run away either. So why should I give it to you?”

“You insolent… Then I’ll get it from your parents!”

The other person’s face turned bright red as he shouted angrily. People’s gazes gathered. And then, it happened.

“Gakane? Gakane Bolunwald? Judging by the red hair, it seems to be him.”

“What’s going on?”

Gakane sighed as he heard the curious murmurs of the southern people around him.

It was a good day, but it had truly become troublesome. He felt embarrassed to face his Cavalry colleagues who had already entered the party hall.

‘I need to resolve this quickly before others see this sight…’

Poverty was not shameful, but it was embarrassing to show such a sight in his hometown where he had finally returned. He already felt apologetic for having more people recognize him compared to other Cavalry members due to his ancestral name, despite not having achieved anything tremendous.

While the other person was engrossed in shouting, Gakane’s shadow secretly squirmed beneath his feet. He was just thinking about how to quietly deal with the other person when two figures suddenly appeared and blocked Gakane’s front.

“Megdolgen Mijelskan. A degenerate gambler and pervert who swindled 300,000 gold in gambling debts, leaving him with neither a horse nor a sword. Gakane, a strange person has latched onto you.”

“…”

Kanna and Yuder were standing in front of him.

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Chapter 997

Kanna and Yuder had somehow already stood before him.

“Kanna, Yuder…” Gakane managed to utter their names, at a loss for words at his friends’ sudden appearance. Kanna grinned brightly in response. She immediately turned around and greeted the anxious Bolunwald family members.

“Hello, you must be Gakane’s family! I’ve heard so much about you all, and I’m delighted to finally meet you.”

“Ah…”

“I’m Kanna Wand, Gakane’s friend. And this is…”

As Kanna lightly tapped Yuder’s arm, he slightly furrowed his brows before opening his mouth.

“Yuder Aile.”

Though slow and blunt as ever, the usual veil-like chill was absent. Perhaps due to the softening effect of his ceremonial attire on the gloomy atmosphere, the expressions of the Bolunwald family members instantly brightened a little. Gakane’s mother stepped forward as a representative and spoke.

“It’s nice to… meet you, Kanna, Yuder. We’ve also heard a lot about you two through Gakane’s letters, and we’re happy to meet you like this…”

Although the unspoken words “despite the situation” hung in the air, Kanna paid no heed and laughed cheerfully.

“Gakane was one of the first friends I made in the Cavalry. He’s always been a wonderful friend who teaches me many things. I’ve always wanted to meet you, and I can’t express how delighted I am to see you here.”

“Oh…”

Upon hearing her son praised, the mother’s expression instantly melted into a bright smile, and the other family members also faintly smiled. They all bore a striking resemblance to Gakane. However, one person who couldn’t tolerate the lightened mood, Megdolgen Mijelskan, shouted in disbelief.

“What are you trying to do, Gakane Bolunwald? Are you planning to pressure me by bringing your colleagues? If you thought I would let that woman’s absurd insult slide just now…!”

“Absurd insult?”

Yuder, who had been standing quietly, repeated Megdolgen’s words and turned his head. As their gazes met, Megdolgen momentarily forgot what he was about to say.

“Urk!”

It felt as if invisible blades were aimed at his throat, vital points, and limbs from all directions, sending chills down his spine. His entire body froze in the face of mortal danger, making it difficult to even breathe properly. It was an unknown terror that Megdolgen experienced for the first time in his life.

‘Wh-what kind of eyes are those…?!’

Megdolgen had also vaguely seen Yuder receiving an award and conversing with Myra from a distance earlier. Although he seemed quite decent for a commoner without a proper background, that was all. Megdolgen had scoffed in disbelief, finding it hard to believe that someone who didn’t even seem capable of properly wielding a sword could have accomplished such incredible feats as rumored.

But now, those eyes…

This inescapable fear, even if he desperately wanted to break free…

“If not, what will you do?”

Yuder asked coldly. Megdolgen finally exhaled and answered, barely managing to hold his trembling legs.

“Wh-what are you talking about?”

“You just claimed that the Deputy Commander of the Cavalry groundlessly insulted you. I asked what you would do if that wasn’t the case.”

“Oh, there’s obviously evidence. Just search his right pants pocket.”

Kanna interjected with a chilling yet bright voice.

“He’s been going around collecting women’s hair and discarded items from the waiting room restroom.”

“What?”

The people watching the incident were all surprised at once. Megdolgen also gasped and touched his own pocket.

‘How did she know…?!’

He had definitely done it when no one was paying attention. Goosebumps rose on his skin, rendering him unable to think. Megdolgen reflexively tried to deny it first.

“Wh-what nonsense are you spouting…?!”

“Nonsense? Are you going to say it’s also nonsense that you sneaked into the waiting room, rummaged through the trash can, and excitedly cherished the stained handkerchiefs and broken pieces of cosmetics?”

Kanna’s answer held no hesitation. She couldn’t have been following him around the entire time, so how did she know every detail? Megdolgen’s mind became hazy.

“…Is this how the Cavalry treats people?! I’m someone who has suffered great harm from Gakane Bolunwald! No matter how much you try to silence me with lies and speculation…!”

“If not, you can prove your innocence by emptying your pockets.”

Yuder spoke like a judge delivering a verdict.

“Wh-why should I…? Ack!”

Suddenly, a pitch-black shadow rose from beneath Megdolgen’s feet, grabbing his collar and flipping him upside down. Megdolgen tried to scream, but the abruptly elongated shadow covered his mouth, rendering him unable to do even that.

‘Aaaah! Save me!’

Amidst the suppressed screams, his body was shaken vigorously while hanging upside down. The carefully hidden items in his pockets fell out with a clatter.

Megdolgen flailed, trying to pick them up while suspended upside down, but to no avail. A pair of feet in fine shoes approached, bent down, and slowly picked them up.

The red-haired handsome man examined the bundled women’s hair, the stained handkerchief, and other discarded belongings with a troubled yet cold expression. The surrounding southerners all covered their mouths, displaying looks of contempt. Gakane’s face showed no sign of enjoyment in the situation as he sighed.

“Hmm… It was true. Well, since it’s Kanna saying it, I naturally thought it would be correct, but…”

‘Gakane…!’

Gakane sighed, looking at Megdolgen, who was screaming something incomprehensible with his mouth covered.

“Megdolgen, I had almost forgotten your name. If you hadn’t bothered me again, whether for money or anything else, I could have continued to forget. But it’s really unforgivable that you came all the way here on such an important day and caused harm to others besides me.”

“…Mmph! Mmph!”

“I’ll say it again, I won’t give you anything. You messed with my family, insulted my colleagues, and tried to ruin Duchess of Herne’s succession ceremony, so there’s even less reason for me to give you anything.”

“For now, think carefully about what you did wrong inside the shadow. The punishment will be carried out after the ceremony ends.”

In the upside-down world, Megdolgen saw the pitch-black darkness that instantly trapped him and closed in. The last thing he saw was Gakane Bolunwald’s handsome face, which looked infinitely firm and frightening, unlike the easily hurt and withered face from long ago…

“…Wow, Gakane! That was really cool just now.”

“Huh? Oh?”

“Did you see the expression that Meg-whatever was making? He was completely frozen and couldn’t say a word!”

After the shadow barrier enveloping Megdolgen sank into the floor and quickly left the hall, Kanna patted Gakane’s shoulder and praised him. As Gakane turned his head in a daze, Yuder Aile nodded slightly and spoke.

“When a disturbance occurs in the hall, the first step is to subdue the instigator and escort them out, then deal with it after the event ends. You handled it well according to the rules.”

“Oh…”

“Duchess of Herne and the Commander, who went to have a conversation, will be back soon, so you can consider it appropriately resolved. Well done, Gakane.”

Gakane finally realized that Duchess of Herne and Kishiar had been absent from their original seats. He hadn’t even properly seen Yuder’s dance due to his family and Megdolgen.

‘Ah… So that’s why Megdolgen was so insistent on not letting me go and trying to get the money now?’

As Gakane turned his gaze, he noticed that not only Kanna and Yuder but also the scattered Cavalry members were secretly and fiercely looking in his direction. Among them were even new recruits with whom Gakane had barely exchanged words. Turning his eyes a little further, he saw Priest Lusan, who was worriedly looking at him while holding a plate of food he was about to eat, and Pharmacist Enon, who clicked his tongue.

He finally realized that it wasn’t just his two friends who were concerned about him.

As Yuder had said, Kishiar and Myra, who had returned to the hall, quickly grasped the small incident that had occurred and reacted according to their respective dispositions.

Kishiar burst into laughter that seemed joyful, but his eyes were not gentle, while Myra frowned in displeasure and approached Gakane, requesting a handshake.

“I went out for a moment to have a conversation with the Cavalry Commander, and I apologize for the unpleasant experience you had to endure as a guest. The chief attendant informed me that this Mijelskan fellow was not on the official guest list invited by Herne.”

“Ah… I see.”

“We will thoroughly investigate how he managed to sneak inside and make him pay the price. Daring to insult a guest invited to the succession ceremony and create a disturbance is tantamount to disrespecting Herne itself.”

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Chapter 998

Myra apologized sincerely while not hiding her anger.

“I’m fine. I didn’t know he had intruded without an invitation, but… as you said, Duchess, I think it’s a matter that requires a clear investigation. I will do my best to help until the issue is resolved.”

Upon hearing Gakane’s answer, Myra shook her head.

“I appreciate your words, but I can’t ask a guest to go that far…”

“No. Since the person he insulted and tried to harm belongs to our Cavalry, the Cavalry also has an obligation to investigate him. As Gakane said, it would be best to proceed together.”

Kishiar, who smoothly intervened between them with a smile on his face, spoke firmly. Myra, lost in thought for a moment, nodded her head refreshingly.

“The Cavalry Commander is right. Then, let’s conduct a joint investigation of that man by the Cavalry and House Herne.”

It was a very brief incident that occurred in the banquet hall.

However, the way Kishiar and Myra handled it gave the people who witnessed the scene a truly profound meaning.

‘There were rumors that Duke Peletta created the Cavalry with a light heart, but seeing it today, that’s not the case at all.’

‘The Emperor’s side is sincere in gathering and protecting the Awakeners. Indeed, just looking at the power Gakane Bolunwald used earlier, it’s understandable. Just by having them, the Emperor will gain a power that no one can challenge.’

‘The new Duchess Herne doesn’t seem to fear or find it insulting to handle internal affairs in cooperation with the outside. It’s completely different from the secretive way the former Duke Herne handled matters.’

The eyes of the people filling the hall continued to change subtly. Yuder didn’t miss any of those changes and remembered them well.

Myra, who had concluded how to deal with Megdolgen Mijelskan’s actions, turned away with a clean resolve. Gakane secretly let out a sigh of relief, but he froze again when Kishiar approached and tapped his shoulder.

“Gakane. You handled the perplexing situation excellently. Can I entrust Mijelskan’s interrogation to you?”

“Ah, yes! Of course.”

“Good to hear such enthusiasm. I’ll personally assist so you can recover the insult you suffered today.”

“Th-there’s no need to go that far…”

Just as Gakane was about to reflexively refuse in surprise, someone naturally yet forcefully kicked the tip of his shoe.

“Ugh?”

“Thank you, Commander! Gakane says he’s grateful too.”

Kanna quickly greeted in a bright voice while holding down Gakane’s startled back. Seeing her gaze, Gakane made a surprised sound and awkwardly bowed his head together. Kishiar laughed at the action that clearly showed his trust in Kanna. He gave a kind look to the Bolunwald family members who were watching this series of events with a slightly dazed expression from behind Gakane.

“Ah. You must be the guests from House Bolunwald. I’ve always been grateful for sending me an excellent member. You must have been quite startled by the unexpected incident, but I hope you forget it all and have a pleasant time.”

“Oh… Yes. Thank you for your consideration.”

Gakane’s father replied in a voice that couldn’t hide his trembling. It was the first time he had seen an imperial family member this close, and who would have imagined that they would politely speak to him first? The Bolunwald family members looked like they were about to faint.

The man, who lastly winked secretly at Yuder, soon turned around and walked away.

Gakane’s younger siblings, who were watching his back as if enchanted, finally came to their senses and clung to Gakane.

“Brother. Is that the Cavalry Commander? He’s so cool. Can I join the Cavalry too?!”

“I’ve never seen anyone more handsome… no, prettier… no, more beautiful than you, brother!”

“Kids… Could you please keep your voices down a bit here?”

Gakane muttered, covering his flushed face. The surrounding Cavalry members who were watching the Bolunwald family also held back their laughter in relief.

At that moment, the prelude to a new dance song began to flow out. Surprisingly, it was the prelude to Avitan, not Rancha, which had been repeating until now.

“Huh…?”

The startled people stopped and murmured in unison.

“What? Could this be…”

“Oh my. Are they really going to play Avitan…?”

While everyone was confused, Myra stepped forward with a nonchalant face, holding the hand of a man. Yuder didn’t know who he was, but some

of the southern nobles seemed to recognize him, as more shocked whispers flowed from here and there.

“Isn’t that man the former Duke’s illegitimate child…?!”

“He was the one who fiercely demanded to be acknowledged as a child for several years, I believe.”

“When he disappeared one day, we thought he was dead…”

The former Duke of Herne had many illegitimate children. Most of them died for various reasons, but it seemed there were still some who survived somewhere. Myra found those who were about to be miserably erased and invited them to her succession ceremony, and even went out to dance with them. It meant that she would acknowledge the remaining illegitimate children as her blood relatives just the same.

It may be easy to say, but it must not have been an easy process. It was even more so considering that she had accomplished it in such a short time.

The man who stepped out to dance in the melody of Avitan undeniably resembled Myra. Although he showed a somewhat tense appearance, he didn’t seem to harbor any hostility towards Myra. Seeing him, Yuder was reminded of Nahan.

On the day of hail, Nahan had seen the enemies created based on Yuder’s memories in the illusion formed by the aftermath of the rampage. If he had survived and opened his eyes, he must have realized something more from those memories.

Even Yuder, who had lived through the future and returned, found it difficult to guess what actions he would take based on that information.

‘He received an apology from Myra then and eventually achieved his revenge by killing the former Duke of Herne. With Hosanna and the Sage dead, and his brainwashing broken, no one knows what path he will choose now that he’s alone.’

He was already a variable in himself. The fact that he had seen Yuder's memories was troublesome in many ways.

'Right after the day of hail, I even thought that I shouldn't have sent Myra to him then…'

Perhaps it was because he was seeing Myra and her half-blood relative dancing together without any hostility or negative feelings towards each other. Or maybe it was thanks to preventing the southern earthquake.

Even if he went back again, he felt like he would have still sent Myra to Nahan then.

Anyway, if it was certain that he was alive, they would meet him somewhere again. Somehow, he could be sure of that.

"Gakane! Shall we go dance?"

While Yuder was lost in thought, Kanna pulled on Gakane's clothes beside him.

"With me?"

"We haven't danced together before. Do you not like it? I thought it would be okay since I'm not good at Rancha yet."

"No, no. It's fine!"

"Okay. Then let's go! Yuder. We'll be back!"

Gakane smiled with a relaxed face and disappeared, led by Kanna's hand. Looking around, other members also seemed to be confidently stepping out, drawn to the familiar Avitan melody.

As they joined around Myra and happily began to dance in a large circle, some southern people who were at a loss also stepped forward with courage.

“Excuse me! Branch Head Kurga Sing. I was about to be crushed by a collapsed stone while walking on the beach in front of Charloin the other day, but you helped me… You may not remember. If it’s alright, could I dance with you?”

“Huh? Are you talking to me?”

Kurga, who was busily devouring food, blinked in surprise at the young lady from a noble family in Charloin who asked him to dance with a flushed face, and,

“…Deputy Commander Ever. Do you have any plans to dance today? I heard you enjoy it, but you don’t seem to be moving today…”

“Huh? I don’t mind, but… Elle. I heard your manifestation has not been long and your body isn’t well yet. Is it okay for you to come like this?”

Ever, who was leaning against the wall and only enjoying conversations with others, tilted her head at the unexpected dance request.

“I’m perfectly fine. It’s alright!”

“Even with Avitan?”

“You didn’t know. I love Avitan the most!”

“I see.”

Pruelle, who finally went out alone with Ever, showed his hands and feet going in the same direction, drawing laughter from those around him.

The unpleasant incident involving Megdolgen Mijelskan that had just occurred was instantly forgotten in everyone’s minds amidst the Avitan melody.

And Yuder walked around the dancing people and extended his hand to a man who was sitting quietly. The man, who blankly looked at the hand placed in front of his face, asked with inscrutable, slanted eyes.

“What is the meaning of this hand?”

“You asked who I would dance the second dance with, didn’t you? This is the answer.”

Kishiar, who was unusually speaking politely and covering his mouth primly, finally laughed as if a flower bud was about to bloom and placed his hand on top of Yuder’s.

2

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Chapter 999

The second dance was performed with much more freedom than the first. Yuder moved his body in tune with the melody, paying no heed to anything else. His dancing skills were not exceptionally outstanding, but that hardly mattered since his partner could flawlessly match his every move.

Their legs, which couldn't touch when they were dancing the Rancha, intertwined, and Yuder felt pleasant in the moments when their faces came close enough for their breaths to tickle each other. He tilted his head back without hesitation, entrusting his body to the hands that embraced and supported his back. In the momentary gaze that met as their clothes fluttered, the deep and hot passion pooled in Kishiar's eyes, reminiscent of a spring, evoked a sense of fullness that Yuder rarely felt.

Yuder quietly parted his lips and whispered words that only Kishiar could hear.

"As you may have guessed, you were the one who first taught me this."

"…Yes. I thought so."

From the moment they first practiced the Avitan together, Kishiar had already noticed that Yuder's every subtle movement resembled his own style. It was a fact that even Yuder himself hadn't known until then, but it made sense when he thought about it. After all, it was Kishiar from his previous life who had first taught Yuder how to dance.

"Back then, I learned the gestures and etiquette used when formally asking for a dance, but I never had the chance to use them with anyone."

"…"

For a moment, Kishiar's gaze changed slightly.

Yuder spoke with a faint smile.

“So, this is the first time.”

Although he had danced with Gakane before, it was more of a means to have a deep conversation with him in secret, away from others. It was never like this feeling. Naturally, he didn’t use the proper etiquette for asking for a dance then.

In his previous life, which was even more barren than now, there was no one to even use dance as a means of conversation, like with Gakane. As a lowly commoner and an omega, treated as neither a proper man nor a woman, and with rumors of being a monster-like Cavalry commander who would cruelly use his power to kill people whenever he got angry, who would want to dance with him? Even if he had asked, no one would have accepted.

Very rarely, when he had to participate in group Rancha dances by the order of Emperor Katchian, he briefly mingled with randomly assigned partners, but that was it. As soon as the sequence was over, he would leave the place immediately, and no one asked Yuder to dance. Yuder ignored them just the same.

‘Well, I asked for many solos, though.’

For occasions that required a partner, he had his Deputy Commander Ever accompany him, and they ended without dancing as well. Later, after a few years, when Yuder’s position became more solidified, the Emperor didn’t say anything even if he didn’t bring a partner, which made things more comfortable.

The place Yuder was most familiar with was the corner of the shade below the platform, where he could perfectly protect Emperor Katchian from any assassins that might suddenly barge in. Even when he saw people dancing joyfully, he never once wanted to join in and mingle with them, and until the day he died, he never formally asked anyone to dance.

Until this very moment.

“The reason you were curious about who my second dance partner would be is because you were confident that my first dance would always be with you, right?”

Since Kishiar had declared that Yuder would always be his partner from now on, it was natural for their first dance to be together. But what about the second one?

“Actually, for me, the second and third are the same.”

Yuder whispered with the utmost sincerity, putting in as much honesty as he could.

“Unless there’s a special reason… No. Honestly, even if there is, I don’t think I’ll ever extend an invitation like the one just now to anyone else. That’s what I think.”

For a moment, the hand on his waist suddenly tightened with force. It was enough to startle the muscles involuntarily. However, that force dissipated like a mirage as soon as Yuder could react.

Since a man who was notoriously good at controlling and suppressing himself would never do such a thing on purpose, it was truly a momentary loss of control.

As proof, there was no longer a hint of a smile on Kishiar’s face.

“Did you dislike me answering so seriously to what was just a light question?”

“…No. Of course not.”

When he tried to get a closer look at that face, the rhythm of the music brought their legs closer, tangling Yuder’s ankles and pulling him nearer. A sigh escaped the man’s lips as their shoulders pressed close, almost buried into each other.

“What do I do with you.”

In that breath, which he barely managed to utter while suppressing something, surprise, bewilderment, and joy and affection that couldn’t be fully hidden were all jumbled together.

“If I were more adept, I would have dismissed your continued inquiries about my second dance partner as half-joking, assuring you not to worry, and would have proudly stated how honored I am to be chosen as your first formal dance partner.”

“…”

“I have no confidence in saying it so nonchalantly. It’s like my head and body are acting separately. I thought I was second to none when it came to shamelessness, but from today on, I feel like I shouldn’t even dare to have such confidence…”

Because it was difficult to hold back the surging emotions.

The face that had moved away again with a sigh-like breath was flushed around the eyes. Although it was a bit inappropriate to think of it in this place, Yuder suddenly recalled his appearance on the bed.

Kishiar closed his eyes tightly and exhaled deeply before opening them again. With that brief moment of breathing, he suppressed the emotions that had surged up and regained his previous composure. However, that was only a superficial change. Deep within the red eyes that met Yuder’s, there was a heat that those watching from afar could never notice.

“Can I ask you one thing?”

“Yes.”

“Did you find any joy, even momentarily, while dancing with me?”

‘I wondered what kind of question he was going to ask.’

Yuder stared at the man who continued to dance, waiting for his answer, and then spoke.

“You’re asking a question that doesn’t even need an answer.”

“…”

“This is the first time I’ve ever felt joy in dancing.”

A smile brighter than any other he had shown today, yet different from before, appeared on Kishiar’s face.

The dance between Yuder Aile and Duke Peletta, which seemed to know nothing of intensity, evoked many indescribable emotions even to those who watched. The fact that the number of participants in the Avitan had increased dramatically after their dance was enough to tell.

The new Duchess Herne’s succession ceremony ended in a completely different atmosphere from before, but not a bad one.

However, the end of the party was also the beginning of a nightmare for someone.

“Megdolgen Mijelskan. How dare you steal an invitation and enter to do such unspeakably dirty things. Who gave you this fake invitation?”

“I told you I got it from a guy I met at the gambling den! Whoever it is, as long as you bring an invitation, you have the right to enter, don’t you?! I even threw away all the things in my pockets, so it’s fine!”

After the party, Megdolgen was tied up in the basement below the mansion and immediately interrogated. Although terrified, Megdolgen tried his best to appear confident in front of Gakane Bolunwald, who was watching from afar, determined not to show such an appearance.

“The things that were in your pocket, you say. As if someone had forcibly put them in.”

“It seems you’re not judging the situation properly. The Herne family kept a record of where they sent all the invitations they made for the succession ceremony. But the invitation you brought was something the Herne family

hadn’t even made in the first place. However, the paper and handwriting used were exactly the same. How did you obtain such a thing?”

“…What?”

“It means that if you don’t properly reveal how you obtained it, your life may also end.”

“Wait. What did you say?”

Confused, Megdolgen quickly realized that his life could be in danger anyway.

“I, I’m telling the truth! I really won it at the gambling den! The fifth son of the Baron Birun family that I usually know… No… Was it someone from Eial?… Who, who was it? Anyway, I, I played a game with that guy and won…”

“…”

“Your claim of being too drunk to remember doesn’t hold up. We’ve already confirmed that none of the individuals you mentioned were there that night. It seems like some other force was at play.”

Kanna, who was standing next to Gakane with an expressionless face, said coldly.

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Chapter 1000

“Are you talking about… the power of Awakeners?”

“It could be, or it might be magic. Well, there are many possibilities.”

Originally, Kanna didn’t need to participate in this interrogation, but she ended up coming here when it was revealed that the part related to the fake invitation, which they had almost glossed over, was actually the most suspicious. If Kanna hadn’t been there, it would have been difficult to quickly grasp the discrepancy between Megdolgen’s memory and the actual information.

Gakein averted his gaze from Megdolgen, who was pathetically trying to recall his memories, tears and snot running down his face. Honestly, it seemed like there was nothing more to get out of that guy now.

“If it was someone’s intention to send that guy here, why was it him of all people? No matter how much I think about it, I don’t understand. Kanna, what do you think?”

“Hmm… Maybe you’re overthinking it?”

Kanna smiled, raising one corner of her lips at Gakane, who tilted his head.

“Think about it. It’s a forged invitation that’s easy to identify as a forgery once you know. But it definitely had an effect, and someone actually came in with it. On a hectic day like today, was that person the only one who came with a forged invitation?”

“You mean…?”

“There might have been other fake guests among the guests who came today that we didn’t notice because they didn’t cause trouble like that person.”

It was a change in perspective. But it wasn't nonsensical.

"You mean there might have been guests who thought the invitation they received was genuine, but they had only received it from somewhere else, like Megdolgen."

"Yeah. And maybe among them, there were those who created that fake invitation."

"Why would they go through such a complicated process…?"

"Hmm… Let's say we're counterfeiters."

Kanna rummaged through her pocket and took out a silver coin.

"If we make and use just one fake coin, it's easy to get caught. But what if we made a hundred, used a few, and scattered the rest among unsuspecting people?"

"…Chaos would ensue as people unknowingly used the fakes, while the creator blends in and escapes easily." Gakane's expression turned serious.

"Exactly. I think the motive behind the fake invitations was similar. To avoid getting caught quickly, even if it meant enduring some inconvenience, it's a method worth trying."

"But even after going through all that, nothing happened at the succession ceremony…"

"Although it might just be my speculation since not much information could be read from that invitation… What if the purpose was to come and 'observe' this succession ceremony itself?"

Gakane's eyes sharpened for a moment at Kanna's words.

"Observing… You mean gathering information?"

"Yeah. It's a great opportunity to directly understand the changes happening in the Herne Duchy, one of the four ducal families. You can also see who

came as guests, so that information alone is very useful.”

“That’s true. For example, our Cavalry… and the Awakener Brigade, which hasn’t been widely known to the outside world until now. Ah, General Gino also came in person.”

“If they aimed for the opportunity to see the most famous Awakeners in the empire in one place, today would have been the best in many ways. Especially since it’s the first time the Awakener Brigade has officially revealed itself.”

Gakane felt a slight chill running up the back of his neck.

Unknown enemies who could create fake invitations so sophisticated that they could deceive the eyes of those who had worked for the Herne family for a lifetime, send them to fake guests, and cleverly manipulate their memories so they couldn’t even remember properly.

Such a feat was beyond the capability of just one or two people.

“Who… and where would they dare to do such a thing?”

In fact, there were some suspicions. The Diarca Duchy, which opposed the imperial family, and the southern tribes, whose existence they had recently begun to recognize in various ways, came to Gakane’s mind.

Before he could voice that thought, Kanna whispered in a voice so small that no one could hear.

“Keep your thoughts as thoughts, Gakane.”

“…”

“Even if you’re sure about it, it’s not our job to do that. Don’t forget that reporting what we’ve found out so far to the Commander and Yuder comes first.”

“…Yeah. You’re right.”

Even if there were suspicions, as Kanna said, voicing those thoughts and being certain about them was a completely different matter. Gakane also clearly remembered what kind of result the momentary carelessness and rashness of the Cavalry members had brought about on the day of the hail.

And in contrast to that dark memory, there was also the endless sense of relief that the names of the Commander and Yuder brought.

Gakane closed his eyes and opened them again. With his usual bright smile, he gestured to Kanna, pointing upwards.

“Then, shall we wrap up here and go back? It doesn’t seem like there’s anything more to find out from Megdolgen.”

“Okay.”

Despite most guests having left, the mansion remained bustling. Gakane, watching a group of musicians packing their instruments from afar, suddenly recalled the dance from a few hours earlier.

More precisely, he recalled two particular individuals among the many dancers who had caught his attention.

‘Yuder… looked so at ease.’

His friend’s face, not caring about the surprised looks of those who were startled by the fact that two men were dancing together, or the inevitable murmurs that came out, had a gentle glow that he had never seen before. Gone were the sharp alertness he always maintained and the unyielding firmness seen in life-or-death battles.

To Gakane, Yuder Aile was always someone he wanted to emulate, and at the same time, a friend he sometimes worried about in many ways. When he showed a superhuman side, leading the entire Cavalry with a level of skill that was hard to believe for someone of the same class, it was nothing but admirable. His superhuman ability to lead the entire Cavalry with seemingly effortless proficiency was admirable, but his almost despairing

lack of social skills, attracting unnecessary hostility or recklessly charging into danger, was worrying.

In terms of human relationships, Yuder often felt like a child left by the water. But today, for the first time, he seemed like a much more adult-like, incomprehensible being compared to Gakane. Gakane thought he probably wasn't the only one who felt that way.

'I had always thought that Yuder's sharp tension was just his nature, but maybe it wasn't.'

The Yuder who was with the Commander looked like someone who didn't know how to be tense in that way at all.

Yuder Aile was capable of letting go of all tension and comfortably enjoying the moment. Or perhaps, away from the entity known as the Cavalry, his true self was originally such.

And the Commander, too, in his interactions with Yuder, wore a face unfamiliar to Gakane, different from any he had known before.

Not an inscrutable imperial family member or a great figure, but an astonishingly ordinary-looking Kishiar La Orr.

In front of that scene, which he wouldn't have believed if he hadn't seen it directly, Gakane felt the worry and concern he had been harboring weakly finally completely evaporate.

'…I had thought that I should keep pretending not to know what the Commander and Yuder did during the day of the hail, but I wonder if that is the right choice…'

"Gakane? What are you thinking about so deeply?"

Gakane's complex train of thought was interrupted by Kanna's call.

"Ah, sorry. I was just thinking about something else for a moment…"

“You can think, but you should take care of your belongings. You dropped your glove.”

“Oh. You’re right.”

The party glove he had taken off and put in his pocket during Megdolgen’s interrogation had fallen out of his pocket. Gakane quickly bent down, and his hand brushed against Kanna’s, who was also trying to pick it up for him.

“…Ah!”

Kanna was startled and recoiled back as if she had been shocked by static electricity.

“Ah, sorry!”

Surprised by her reaction, Gakane also reflexively apologized, but she stared at her own hand for a long time as if she had been shocked by something.

“Kanna…? What’s wrong?”

“…Ah, no. It’s nothing… but…”

Kanna’s face, which was fumbling with an expression that was not at all nothing, gradually turned pale. After a moment, she covered her face with her hands and exclaimed.

“Sorry, Gakane! I think I just unintentionally read something!”

“Huh? Wha-what…?”

“You… you knew about them too…?”

“Uh, what?”

“Yuder and the Commander…”

Sometimes, even without any subject or object, the tone of those words and the other person’s gaze alone can make you realize something.

For Gakane Bolunwald and Kanna Wand, this moment was like that.

“…Ah… Could it be… Kanna, you too…?”

“Ah…”

“…”

“…”

“What are you two doing, standing there?”

And sometimes, the person you least want to appear at such a moment does appear.

Gakane and Kanna simultaneously turned their heads toward where the voice came from. Yuder Aile, whom they naturally thought had already returned with the Cavalry, was standing there alone.

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